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ANCIENT BALLADS AND
LEGENDS OF HINDUSTAN



ANCIENT BALLADS AND LEGENDS OF HINDUSTAN

BY
TORU DUTT

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY MEMOIR

BY
AMARANATHA JHA

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TORU DUTT

INTRODUCTORY MEMOIR

The Greek Menander said that they whom the gods love die young, and many have been the inheritors of unfulfilled renown. Perhaps none of them was so unique as Toru Dutt. Frail and delicate since birth, brought up by a doting father, who lavished every care and attention on her, born in a Hindu family but converted early to Christianity, fed on Hindu myths and legends acquired both through books and through oral tradition, educated in Europe and longing to return to England, attracted towards the end of her life by Sanskrit and devoting weary hours to its grammatical intricacies, writing in French and English but not in her mother-tongue, publishing works in both these languages, leaving behind with those who knew her the fragrant memory of an exceedingly charming personality, dying before she was twenty-two, Toru Dutt is one of the most poignant examples of those

who before their proper time pass through the door of darkness. This song-bird with a sweet but sad voice seemed whilst she lived to be a fleeting visitant from another sphere; even when she was a little girl she was described by her father as:

“Puny and elf-like, with dishevelled tresses,
Self-willed and shy, ne’er heeding that I call,
Intent to pay her tenderest addresses
To bird or cat,—but most intelligent.”

The shadow of death began to darken her life quite early, and when the grim spectre arrived, she was ready. But who can help regretting how much of grace and literary talent came to an end before it could find expression?

As a result of English education many Indians have for over a century written English prose and verse. It may be doubted if in the literary history of any country there is such a phenomenon. In the middle ages a number of scholarly Englishmen wrote in the universal tongue; but in no history of Latin literature is any rank assigned to the Latin works of even such erudite masters as Bacon and Milton,

although in the vulgar tongue they attained an eminence which remains unchallenged. When French was the dominant language in England, no native of England produced any book which can be regarded as being a memorable French work. Many distinguished Frenchmen have been penetrating critics of English: one recalls Sainte Beuve, Jusserand, Maurois, Legouis, Cazamian. But none of them is considered to be a great writer of English. Almost the solitary instance of a foreigner winning recognition as a major writer in English is that of Joseph Conrad. But in India thousands of men and women write and speak English, some with a reasonable correctness, a few with real grace and vigour, and most at least with ease and fluency. Ill-natured gibes against "Indian-English" and "Babu Pichey Lal, B.A."; examples of petitions and posters collected together in Curzon's "Leaves from a Viceroy's Note Book"—may make one ignore the hundreds of persons who are engaged in Anglo-Indian journalism, writing articles and notes in the daily paper in English, the thousands of persons arguing in the law-courts. Those who teach in colleges and universities, those engaged in administration, those

framing laws and criticising governments in the Councils and Assemblies,—are expressing themselves through the medium of English and managing at least their day to day business with a fair amount of efficiency. There are, too, persons engaged in creative and critical literary work, some who have not written a line in their mother-tongue. It is not easy to be exact, but at least a hundred Indians must have produced volumes of poetical writings, not to mention the thousands whose verse effusions appear in fugitive form, in journals and newspapers. Indian writers have contributed a peculiar quality, a distinctive touch which those who have not breathed the air of this land and lived in the midst of its people, can hardly aspire to appreciate. The Dutt family, consisting of Rajnarain, Hurchunder, Govindchunder, Omeshchunder, and Sosheechunder (to adhere to the outlandish form in which the names were then spelt), published in 1870, the *Dutt Family Album*. Maharaja Sir Jotindra Mohan Tagore published some verses; here are some haunting lines from his "Rajput Soldier's Farewell":

“Once more, farewell! If gracious Rama
But spare this life of mine,
For every pain I’ll find a balm
On those sweet lips of thine, dear love, on
those sweet lips of thine.

But if remorseless death should dart
The cruel shaft at me,
Though hence my spirit should depart,
It still should pray for thee, dear love, it still
should pray for thee.”

There was Nobokissen Ghose, who was better known as Ram Sharma, and whose collected poems cover more than three hundred pages. They are not all short poems; one, entitled “The Last Day” is more than 1200 lines long; another “The Bhagabati Gita” has over 700 lines. One stanza in his “Song of the Plough” is:

“They say Creation’s fair and bright,
The sun and moon and stars above—
All—all are things of joy and light,
Of joy and light and hope and love.
But the earth is hard, the sun is hot,
Bear witness, my worn limbs and frame!

The moon and stars—I know them not—
I scarce can give a thought to them!
Strike hard the turf, oh drive the ploughshare
deep,
And sow that Wealth your harvests all may
reap!”

Then there was Manmohan Ghose, early associated with Laurence Binyon and Stephen Phillips, whose career began with much promise but meandered along professional duties to an end characterised by bitter disillusion and dull despair. That wayward man of genius, Oscar Wilde had said of him that he gave some culture to Christ Church: “his verses show how quick and subtle are the intellectual sympathies of the Oriental mind, and suggest how close is the bond of union that may some day bind India to us by other methods than those of commerce and military strength. Mr. Ghose ought someday to make a name in our literature.” Mr. Binyon states that even at school he had been struck with Ghose’s admiration for Theocritus, Meleager, and above all Simonides. He seemed on his return to India to be an exile; he spoke of “the magic sound of Europe”; he never

realized his ambition of revisiting England. Mr. Binyon's estimate is: "To us he is a voice among the great company of English singers; somewhat apart and solitary, with a difference in his note, but not an echo". His poems, collected together in 1926, two years after his death, and published by Basil Blackwell under the title "*Songs of Love and Death*", give no indication of any characteristic, and imagery, any sentiments that can be said to be peculiarly Indian. "De-nationalised, that is the word for me", he had once written in a mood of regret. He seems to have completely identified himself, in spirit and thought and imagination, with the West. A poem like this might have been written by any Englishman:

"Over thy head, in joyful wanderings
Through heaven's wide spaces, free,
Birds fly with music in their wings,
And from the blue rough sea
The fishes flash and leap;
There is a life of loveliest things
O'er thee so fast asleep.

In the deep West the heavens grow heavenlier
Eve after eve; and still

The glorious stars remember to appear;
The roses on the hill
Are fragrant as before;
Only thy face of all that's dear
I shall see never more."

Then there is his brother, the sage of Pondicherry, Aurobindo Ghose who, alone among Indian poets, has attained proficiency in the use of the blank verse and has such memorable lines as "and all the lonely uselessness of pain", "with overwhelming sweetness miserable", "tears and dumb bitterness and pain unpitied". Roby Datta published, in 1909, a volume of about 350 pages, entitled "*Echoes from East and West*"; he died an early and violent death which cut short a career of much brightness. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, a singer who more than almost any other Indian poet, has managed to remain Indian in her poetry, the coiner of matchless phrases in her speeches, charming orator, political leader, author of three volumes of verse, happily still engaged in active literary and political life, began writing English poetry in the nineties of the last century. Her technical skill is high and as word-artist and master of melodious verse

she is among the most brilliant and accomplished of Indian poets. Mr. Arthur Symons spoke of the bird-like quality of her song and of the magic of the East. But with the passage of years that early freshness, ecstasy, and exuberance have yielded place to a wistful longing for what is no more, a recognition of Fate as a wall no hope may scale, the desire to speak of the shrine, of dead dreams and the temple of tears and yet, the aspiration to scale the stars. Her words are foreign, the metrical forms are English, but the dreams and fancies are all from India and of India.

Her brother, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, has lyrical gifts of a rare order. Some of his pieces are gems of pure delight, full of the joy of life. Here is a good example of his thoughtful verse:

"The clod of clay, in an eternal hour,
Desires to be a flower;
The flower to spread its petals wide and far
And bird-like reach a star;
The twinkling star desires its flame to fan
Into the soul of man;
And man grows hungry to be somewhat greater
Than man and turn Creator;

And then again the hungry dream of God
Is to become a clod.

Creation with its shadow and its fire
Is but a ceaseless cycle of desire."

Many decades hence, all this may be looked upon as an exceptional spectacle in the evolution of the new Indian nationhood; the ardent nationalist may bestow a smile of superior good-nature at these efforts at self-expression in a difficult foreign medium; the insular Englishman may consider them as misguided and ill-advised endeavours destined to inevitable failure. But a disinterested critic will assign to them a fairly high rank from the purely literary standpoint. National pride and imperial arrogance apart, the work of poets like Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Manmohan Ghosh, and half a dozen others is of sufficient merit to justify admiring reference in any full history of English literature. Whether Indians should continue to do creative work in English and whether this practice of English has not stood in the way of the full development and progress of the Indian languages, are different questions which admit of more than a single answer. But the last century will be remembered for the many

successful efforts made by Indians to write English almost as to the manner born.

Toru Dutt was born in Rambagan, 12 Manicktollah Street, Calcutta, on March 4, 1856. At the age of 12 she accompanied her father to Europe and joined a school at Nice. Mr. Govind Chunder Dutt, her father, had embraced Christianity with his brothers. All the family was baptised in 1862. At Nice, Toru acquired her remarkable knowledge of French. A year later they went to London, where Toru took lessons in music. In 1871 she went to Cambridge, and attended the higher lectures for women. In 1873, after a stay abroad of four years, they returned to Calcutta. The next year, her sister Aru died at the age of twenty. In 1874, she published her first essay, on Leconte de Lisle, also an essay on the Anglo-Indian poet, Derozio. It occurred to her then to start learning Sanskrit, in the hope, as she said, to "be able to bring out another 'sheaf', not gleaned in French but in Sanskrit Fields!" In 1877, she died on August 30, at 12 Manicktollah Street. This is the full history of her life. But, thanks to the care of her friends, it is possible to have a clear and com-

prehensive view of her hopes and longings and daily doings from the letters which she wrote to them and which have been preserved by them. There she spoke out and laid bare her soul: her deep affection for England; her passion for her garden-house, its flowers and fruits and birds; her absorption in Sanskritic studies; and, like the refrain of a tragic chorus, her courageous hope that she would triumph over illness and disease.

Here are some sentences in which she hopes she might soon return to Europe. In December, 1873, within a few months of her arrival in India, she says: "We hope to return to England and settle there for good; wouldn't that be jolly?" Again, in May, 1874: "We all want so much to return to England." In November, 1874: "We hope to settle in England and not return to India any more." On January 9, 1875: "We want to sell off the garden before we leave India, as then we shall be able to settle for good in England." But that was not to be.

The letters are full of references to her garden and garden-house: "I wish I could send you a basket of our fruits of the season. It would gladden your eyes! Yellow or vermillion mangoes,

red leechies, white jumrools and deep violet *jams*." "The mornings are pleasant in the garden. Very early, at about three in the morning, the *Bheem-raj*, a little bird, begins his song; half an hour afterwards, all the bushes and trees burst into melody, the *kokila*, the *Bow-katha-kow*—which means, "Speak, O bride",—the *Papia*, etc. And the gay little humming-birds, with their brilliant colours, dive into the flowers for honey with busy twitters."

More than anything else what constantly preoccupies her and concerns her is her illness, which she must have realized would prove as fatal for her as it had proved for Aru, and despite which she managed to remain bright and cheerful, planning for the future, refusing to be cast down, acquiescing in what she knew was inevitable. Not once or twice but again and again she has to tell the tale of her lungs. Already, in March, 1874, she says: "I have been in bed and could not go a step beyond my bedroom for more than a month; for the last four or five days I am feeling much better and am allowed to stir about a little." "I have not been downstairs for a long time." In May: "For the last two days I have had a very bad cough, with spitting of

blood." In November, "I have still got a slight cough, but there is no blood-spitting with it now". In December, "We are all well at present, only my cough troubles me; I hope I shall soon get rid of it, for it's a long time that I have had it." The next month, "I have had another attack of fever last month." In February, "I have been very ill." For a whole year after that she seems to have enjoyed a respite from illness, and it is not until the February of 1876 that she complains again of cough and fever. In March, "I am pretty well just now, but a few days ago my cough increased, and I spat some blood." In May she wonders if she will live to be thirty. A few months later, "I am better than I was a week ago, but not quite well; the fever at nights has abated but not quite gone." In October, "You must have learnt by this time through my previous letters that I had been unable to write to you on account of illness." In November, "You must have guessed by my not writing to you last week that I was unwell; I was so indeed. You know I always suffer from an increase of cough, spitting blood, and congestion of the lungs, every winter since my return to India." The next month,

"I have been coughing a great deal of blood, and am quite weak and prostrate." In February, 1877: "I could not write to you yesterday, as I had one of my bad fits of blood-spitting." In June, "I am still very ill—fever everyday." In July, "I have been very, very ill, but under God's blessing I am better now, though still unwell and weak." The next month, on August 30, her race was run.

The first book which Toru Dutt published was "*A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*;" it consisted of translations from the work of 70 or 80 different authors, including 30 pieces from Victor Hugo—displaying thus a truly remarkable acquaintance with French literature. A second edition appeared in 1878, also from Calcutta, and in 1880, Messrs. Kegan Paul & Co. published the third edition. The first edition attracted the notice of Edmund Gosse who reviewed it in *The Examiner* of 1876. Toru Dutt wrote also a French novel, entitled *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers*, and an unfinished romance in English, called *Bianca*. In 1882 appeared *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, with an introduction by Edmund Gosse. When

he had reviewed her first book, Gosse had written: "The English verse is sometimes exquisite; at other times the rules of our prosody are absolutely ignored, and it is obvious that the Hindu poetess was chanting to herself a music that is discord in an English ear." A similar critical tone was adopted by the reviewer of *The Englishman*, who said: "Miss Dutt's metre often limps, her grammar is not always faultless, and her expressions are sometimes quaint or tame." In August, 1879, the *Saturday Review* wrote: "There is every reason to believe that in intellectual power Toru Dutt was one of the most remarkable women that ever lived. Had George Sand or George Eliot died at the age of twenty-one, they would certainly not have left behind them any proof of application or of originality superior to those bequeathed to us by Toru Dutt." Edmund Gosse was even more enthusiastic: "It is difficult to exaggerate when we try to estimate what we have lost in the premature death of Toru Dutt. Literature has no honours which need have been beyond the grasp of a girl who at the age of twenty-one, and in languages separated from her own by so deep a chasm, had produced so much of lasting worth."

Dr. Edward Thompson speaks of her as a poet whose place is with Sappho and Emile Bronte—a singularly inapt company, except in regard to their common womanhood. Sappho, that creature of fire and force, who even in translation can move and charm with impassioned personal lyrics, had little in common with Toru Dutt. Sappho's passion-laden songs such as these might have been written by Toru if she had lived longer, although speculations like this are futile:

“Oh, come then, and release me from alarms
That crush me: all I long to see
Fulfilled, fulfil! A very mate-in-arms
Be thou to me.”

or

“The moon is gone
And the Pleiads set,
Midnight is nigh;
Time passes on,
And passes, yet
Alone I lie”.

Such a personal utterance Toru never attempted.

Nor is there any indication that she would have grown in such wise as to express herself as Emily Brontë. Indeed, it is noteworthy that she hardly wrote any subjective poetry. A few of the "Miscellaneous Poems" do suggest that if she had secured greater confidence in herself as an individual and considered her own thoughts and feelings worthy of commemoration and if they had become so intense as to compel expression she might have written beautiful lyrics, but one may question if the feminine reserve and shyness of the East would have permitted the outspokenness associated with Sappho. The piece entitled "The Tree of Life" describes a vision in sleep. More memorable is the famous "Our Casuarina Tree", in which are admirably mingled local touches and literary reminiscence; where there is objective description of the actual tree, and the charm of association with her childhood; where the poet invests this one tree with glamour that is communicated from the poet to the reader so effectively that it is no longer a tree in the garden-house in Calcutta, but any tree that the reader may know, here or elsewhere, with which in memory he connects sweetness and affection

and the many unremembered little incidents that enrich life.

“Like a huge python, winding round and round
The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars
Up to its very summit near the stars,
A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
No other tree could live. But gallantly
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung
In crimson clusters all the boughs among,
Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;
And oft at nights the garden overflows
With one sweet song that seems to have no close
Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose.

When first my casement is wide open thrown
At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;
Sometimes, and most in winter,—on its crest
A grey baboon sits statue-like alone
Watching the sunrise, while on lower boughs
His puny offspring leap about and play;
And far and near kokilas hail the day;
And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows;
And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast
By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast,
The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed.

But not because of its magnificence
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:
Beneath it we have played; though years may
roll,
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,
For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear!
Blent with your images, it shall arise
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!
What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?
It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,
That haply to the unknown land may reach.
Unknown, yet well-known to the eye of faith!
Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away
In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,
When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith
And the waves gently kissed the classic shore
Of France or Italy, beneath the moon,
When earth lay tranced in a dreamless swoon:
And every time the music rose,—before
Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,
Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime
I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.
Therefore, I fair would consecrate a lay
Unto thy honour, Tree, beloved of those

Who now in blessed sleep, for aye, repose,
Dearer than life to me, alas! were they.

Mayst thou be numbered when my days are
done

With deathless trees—like those in Borrowdale,
Under whose awful branches lingered pale

“Fear, trembling Hope, and Death the skeleton
And Time the shadow”; and though dark the
verse

That would thy beauty fain, oh fain rehearse,
May Love defend thee from Oblivion’s curse.

This unique poem deserves to be remembered, as also the two sonnets in which the poet reveals a keen sensitiveness to nature and specially to colour. Both of them show how responsive Toru Dutt was to colour and how sharp her powers of observation were. In the sonnet entitled “The Lotus”, one feels as though the poet had read Tennyson’s “Akbar’s Dream”:

“Shall the rose

Cry to the lotus ‘No flower thou?’”

But Tennyson’s poem appeared in 1892 !

The Lotus

"Love came to Flora asking for a flower

That would of flowers be undisputed queen,
The lily and the rose, long, long had been
Rivals for that high honour. Bards of power
Had sung their claims. "The rose can never
tower

Like the pale lily with her Juno mien"—

"But is the lily lovelier?" Thus between
Flower-factions rang the strife in Psyche's
bower.

"Give me a flower delicious as the rose

And stately as the lily in her pride"—

"But of what colour?"—"Rose-red", Love
first chose,

Then prayed, 'No, lily-white,—or both
provide";

And Flora gave the lotus, "rose-red" dyed
And "lily-white",—the queenliest flower that
blows."

Then there is the other sonnet on the Baugmaree
Garden

"A sea of foliage girds our garden round,

But not a sea of dull unvaried green,

Sharp contrasts of all colours here are seen;
The light-green graceful tamarinds abound
Amid the mango clumps of green profound,
And palms arise, like pillars grey, between;

And o'er the quiet pools the seemuls lean,
Red,—red, and startling like a trumpet's sound.
But nothing can be lovelier than the ranges
Of bamboos to the eastward, when the moon
Looks through their gaps, and the white lotus
changes

Into a cup of silver. One might swoon
Drunken with beauty then, or gaze and gaze
On a primeval Eden, in amaze."

One may regret that the poet did not write more sonnets to demonstrate her sovereignty over their scanty plot of ground. She wrote blank verse, too. Here is a notable passage with which the piece entitled "The Royal Ascetic" ends:

"Not in seclusion, not apart from all,
Not in a place elected for its peace,
But in the heat and bustle of the world,
'Mid sorrow, sickness, suffering, and sin,

Must he still labour with a loving soul
Who strives to enter through the narrow gate."

As one reads the ballads printed in this volume one is struck with the large space covered by descriptions of nature. Indeed, it may be reasonably said that had she lived longer she would have attained distinction in narrative verse and in descriptive verse. She has a rare gift of story-telling, of arousing interest and curiosity, of creating suspense, and of drawing character. But perhaps in descriptive poetry she is even superior. This is how Yama, the God of Death, is described:

"Upon his head he wore a crown
That shimmered in the doubtful light;
His vestment scarlet reached low down,
His waist, a golden girdle, dight.
His skin was dark as bronze; his face
Irradiate, and yet severe;
His eyes had much of love and grace
But glowed so bright, they filled with fear."

And here, from "Buttoo" is the description of a forest scene:

INTRODUCTORY MEMOIR

“What glorious trees! The sombre saul
On which the eye delights to rest,
The betel-nut,—a pillar tall,
With feathery branches for a crest,
The light-leaved tamarind spreading wide,
The pale faint-scented bitter neem,
The seemul, gorgeous as a bride,
With flowers that have the ruby’s gleam,
The Indian fig’s pavilion tent
In which whole armies might repose,
With here and there a little rent,
The sunset’s beauty to disclose,
The bamboo boughs that sway and swing
’Neath bulbuls as the south wind blows,
The mango-tope, a close dark ring,
Home of the rooks and clamorous crows,
The champak, bok, and South-sea pine,
The nagessur with pendant flowers
Like ear-rings,—and the forest vine
That clinging over all, embowers,
The sirish famed in Sanskrit song
Which rural maidens love to wear,
The peepul, giant-like and strong,
The bramble with its matted hair,—
All these and thousands, thousands more,
With helmet red, or golden crown,

Or green tiara, rose before
The youth in evening's shadows brown."

In describing Savitri's faint hopes and vivid fears, she says:

"Incessant in her prayers from morn,
The noon is safely tided,—then
A gleam of faint, faint hope is born,
But the heart fluttered like a wren
That sees the shadow of the hawk
Sail on,—and trembles in affright,
Lest a down rushing swoop should mock
Its fortune, and o'erwhelm it quite."

There are numerous flashes of poetic beauty, truths that come by intuition, maxims that more experienced persons might have been proud to coin. Here is a sentence that does not read like the utterance of one barely out of her teens:

"Death comes to all soon or late:
And peace is but a wandering fire."

There is another passage typically Indian, bearing the unmistakable stamp of Vedanta, expressing a philosophy that she had inherited and a creed that she had naturally imbibed, stating

what her innermost heart prompted, and not merely saying what Savitri might have said. For all her Western training and the faith under the influence of which she had been brought up, she never ceased to be Indian. The ancient legends were not exotic for her; their atmosphere was not alien. The stories of the past stirred her and touched a responsive chord within her. The call of the land and the call of her ancestors evoked a sympathetic answer within her and she wrote of the old myths and tales without feeling or making her readers feel that they were effete, improbable, fantastic. And the ballads are interspersed with sententious remarks that suggest much deep thought and familiarity with the best expositions of the Hindu view of life. This is what she makes Savitri say; this is what any Hindu, even unlettered and untaught, might say:

"I know that in this transient world
All is delusion,—nothing true;
I know its shows are mists unfurled
To please and vanish. To renew
Its bubble joys, be magic bound
In *Maya's* network frail and fair,

Is not my aim ! The gladsome sound
Of husband, brother, friend, is air
To such as know that all must die,
And that at last the time must come,
When eye shall speak no more to eye
And Love cry,—lo, this is my sum.”

These lines suggest a darkening of the shadow, a reflection of what might have been the line she would have taken in her later poetry:

“The heart its king
Finds often like a lightning flash;
We play,—we jest,—we have no care,—
When hark, a step,—there comes no crash,—
But life, or silent, slow despair.”

In another passage there is this aphorism:

“And what if I should chance to die ?
None miss one bubble from a stream.”

The lines of the youthful Prahlada are couched in terms of energy and faith. His father had asked him where his God was and what he looked like, and why he did not come down to help his devotee. The young lad looked round, bewildered but yet full of faith.

“Hath He a shape, or hath He none?
I know not this, nor care to know,
Dwelling in light, to which the sun
Is darkness,—He sees all below,
Himself unseen!”

Toru Dutt anticipates the sneers of the sceptic, proud of his modernism, scorning half-forgotten tales of old, even though they be so sad, so tender, and so true:

“Absurd may be the tale I tell,
Ill-suited to the marching times,
I loved the lips from which it fell,
So let it stand among my rhymes.”

Writing in 1940, in the year of the fall of France, one may draw attention to these lines composed in 1870, and entitled “France”:

“Head of the human column, thus
Ever in swoon wilt thou remain?
Thought, Freedom, Truth, quenched ominous
Whence then shall Hope arise for us,
Plunged in the darkness all again.

No, she stirs!—There’s a fire in her glance,
Ware, oh ware of that broken sword!

What, dare ye for an hour's mischance,
Gather around her, jeering France,
Attila's own exultant horde?

Lo, she stands up,—stands up e'en now,
Strong once more for the battle-fray,
Gleams bright the star, that from her brow
Lightens the world. Bow, nations, bow,
Let her again lead on the way!"

* * *

One cannot help regretting that time cut short prematurely a career of such promise and such early fulfilment. There were few poetic glories which, given maturity, she could not have achieved. She could have interpreted to the West the spirit of India and could have brought about a closer and more sympathetic understanding. She might have developed into a novelist or a writer of lyrics breathing grace and sweetness. That was not to be. Let us be content that we had this brief visitant in our midst and that she remains eternally young, for ever fresh and for ever fair, still dreaming the glittering dreams of youth.

September 6, 1940.

AMARANATHA JHA

ANCIENT BALLADS OF HINDUSTAN

I

SAVITRI

PART I

Savitri was the only child
Of Madra's wise and mighty king;
Stern warriors, when they saw her, smiled,
As mountains smile to see the spring.
Fair as a lotus when the moon
Kisses its opening petals red,
After sweet showers in sultry June!
With happier heart, and lighter tread,
Chance strangers, having met her, past,
And often would they turn the head
A lingering second look to cast,
And bless the vision ere it fled.

What was her own peculiar charm?

The soft black eyes, the raven hair,
The curving neck, the rounded arm,

All these are common everywhere.

Her charm was this—upon her face

Childlike and innocent and fair,

No man with thought impure or base

Could ever look;—the glory there,

The sweet simplicity and grace,

Abashed the boldest; but the good

God's purity there loved to trace,

Mirrored in dawning womanhood.

In those far-off primeval days

Fair India's daughters were not pent

In closed zenanas. On her ways

Savitri at her pleasure went

Whither she chose,—and hour by hour

With young companions of her age,

She roamed the woods for fruit or flower,

Or loitered in some hermitage,

For to the Munis gray and old

Her presence was as sunshine glad,

They taught her wonders manifold

And gave her of the best they had.

Her father let her have her way
In all things, whether high or low;
He feared no harm; he knew no ill
Could touch a nature pure as snow.
Long childless, as a priceless boon
He had obtained this child at last
By prayers, made morning, night, and noon
With many a vigil, many a fast;
Would Shiva his own gift recall,
Or mar its perfect beauty ever?—
No, he had faith,—he gave her all
She wished, and feared and doubted never.

And so she wandered where she pleased
In boyish freedom. Happy time!
No small vexations ever teased,
Nor crushing sorrows dimmed her prime.
One care alone, her father felt—
Where should he find a fitting mate
For one so pure?—His thoughts long dwelt
On this as with his queen he sate.
“Ah, whom, dear wife, should we select?”
“Leave it to God,” she answering cried,
“Savitri may herself elect
Some day, her future lord and guide.”

Months passed, and lo, one summer morn
As to the hermitage she went
Through smiling fields of waving corn,
She saw some youths on sport intent,
Sons of the hermits, and their peers,
And one among them tall and lithe
Royal in port,—on whom the years,
Consenting, shed a grace so blithe,
So frank and noble, that the eye
Was loth to quit that sun-browned face;
She looked and looked,—then gave a sigh,
And slackened suddenly her pace.

What was the meaning—was it love?
Love at first sight, as poets sing,
Is then no fiction? Heaven above
Is witness, that the heart its king
Finds often like a lightning flash;
We play,—we jest,—we have no care,—
When hark a step,—there comes no crash,—
But life, or silent slow despair.
Their eyes just met,—Savitri past
Into the friendly Muni's hut,
Her heart-rose opened had at last—
Opened no flower can ever shut.

In converse with the gray-haired sage
She learnt the story of the youth,
His name and place and parentage—
Of royal race he was in truth.
Satyavan was he hight,—his sire
Dyousmatsen had been Salva's king,
But old and blind, opponents dire
Had gathered round him in a ring
And snatched the sceptre from his hand;
Now,—with his queen and only son
He lived a hermit in the land,
And gentler hermit was there none.

With many tears was said and heard
The story,—and with praise sincere
Of Prince Satyavan; every word
Sent up a flush on cheek and ear,
Unnoticed. Hark! The bells remind
'Tis time to go,—she went away,
Leaving her virgin heart behind,
And richer for the loss. A ray,
Shot down from heaven, appeared to tinge
All objects with supernal light,
The thatches had a rainbow fringe,
The cornfields looked more green and bright.

Savitri's first care was to tell
Her mother all her feelings new;
The queen her own fears to dispel
To the king's private chamber flew.
"Now what is it, my gentle queen,
That makes thee hurry in this wise?"
She told him, smiles and tears between,
All she had heard; the king with sighs
Sadly replied:—"I fear me much!
Whence is his race and what his creed?
Not knowing aught, can we in such
A matter delicate, proceed?"

As if the king's doubts to allay,
Came Narad Muni to the place
A few days after. Old and gray,
All loved to see the gossip's face,
Great Brahma's son,—adored of men,
Long absent, doubly welcome he
Unto the monarch, hoping then
By his assistance, clear to see.
No god in heaven, nor king on earth,
But Narad knew his history,—
The sun's, the moon's, the planets' birth
Was not to him a mystery.

“Now welcome, welcome, dear old friend,
All hail, and welcome once again !”
The greeting had not reached its end,
When glided like a music-strain
Savitri’s presence through the room.—
“And who is this bright creature, say,
Whose radiance lights the chamber’s gloom—
Is she an Apsara or fay ?”
“No son thy servant hath, alas !
This is my one,—my only child ;”—
“And married?”—“No.”—“The seasons pass,
Make haste, O king,”—he said, and smiled.

“That is the very theme, O sage,
In which thy wisdom ripe I need;
Seen hath she at the hermitage
A youth to whom in very deed
Her heart inclines.”—“And who is he?”
“My daughter, tell his name and race,
Speak as to men who best love thee.”
She turned to them her modest face,
And answered quietly and clear.—
“Ah, no ! ah, no !—It cannot be—
Choose out another husband, dear,”—
The Muni cried,—“or woe is me !”

“And why should I ? When I have given
My heart away, though but in thought,
Can I take back ? Forbid it, Heaven !

It were a deadly sin, I wot.

And why should I ? I know no crime
In him or his.”—“Believe me, child,

My reasons shall be clear in time,

I speak not like a madman wild;

Trust me in this.”—“I cannot break

A plighted faith,—I cannot bear

A wounded conscience.”—“Oh, forsake

This fancy, hence may spring despair.”—

“It may not be.”—The father heard

By turns the speakers, and in doubt

Thus interposed a gentle word,—

“Friend should to friend his mind speak out,
Is he not worthy? tell us.”—“Nay,

All worthiness is in Satyavan,

And no one can my praise gainsay:

Of solar race—more god than man!

Great Soorasen, his ancestor,

And Dyoumatsen his father blind

Are known to fame: I can aver

No kings have been so good and kind.”

“Then where, O Muni, is the bar?
If wealth be gone, and kingdom lost,
His merit still remains a star,
Nor melts his lineage like the frost.
For riches, worldly power, or rank
I care not,—I would have my son
Pure, wise, and brave,—the Fates I thank
I see no hindrance, no, not one.”
“Since thou insistest, King, to hear
The fatal truth,—I tell you,—I,
Upon this day as rounds the year
The young Prince Satyavan shall die.”

This was enough. The monarch knew,
The future was no sealèd book
To Brahma's son. A clammy dew
Spread on his brow,—he gently took
Savitri's palm in his, and said:
“No child can give away her hand,
A pledge is nought unsanctioned;
And here, if right I understand,
There was no pledge at all,—a thought,
A shadow,—barely crossed the mind—
Unblamed, it may be clean forgot,
Before the gods it cannot bind.

“And think upon the dreadful curse
Of widowhood; the vigils, fasts,
And penances; no life is worse
Than hopeless life,—the while it lasts.
Day follows day in one long round,
Monotonous and blank and drear;
Less painful were it to be bound
On some bleak rock, for aye to hear—
Without one chance of getting free—
The ocean’s melancholy voice!
Mine be the sin,—if sin there be,
But thou must make a different choice.”

In the meek grace of virginhood
Unblanched her cheek, undimmed her eye,
Savitri, like a statue, stood,
Somewhat austere was her reply.
“Once, and once only, all submit
To Destiny,—’tis God’s command;
Once, and once only, so ’tis writ,
Shall woman pledge her faith and hand;
Once, and once only, can a sire
Unto his well-loved daughter say,
In presence of the witness fire,
I give thee to this man away.”

“Once, and once only, have I given
My heart and faith—’tis past recall;
With conscience none have ever striven,
And none may strive, without a fall.
Not the less solemn was my vow
Because unheard, and oh! the sin
Will not be less, if I should now
Deny the feeling felt within.
Unwedded to my dying day
I must, my father dear, remain;
’Tis well, if so thou will’st, but say
Can man balk Fate, or break its chain?

“If Fate so rules, that I should feel
The miseries of a widow’s life,
Can man’s device the doom repeal?
Unequal seems to be a strife,
Between Humanity and Fate;
None have on earth what they desire;
Death comes to all or soon or late;
And peace is but a wandering fire;
Expediency leads wild astray;
The Right must be our guiding star;
Duty our watchword, come what may;
Judge for me, friends,—as wiser far.”

' She said, and meekly looked to both.

The father, though he patient heard,
To give the sanction still seemed loth,
But Narad Muni took the word.

"Bless thee, my child! 'Tis not for us
To question the Almighty will,
Though cloud on cloud loom ominous,
In gentle rain they may distil."

At this, the monarch—"Be it so!

I sanction what my friend approves;
All praise to Him, whom praise we owe;
My child shall wed the youth she loves."

PART II

Great joy in Madra. Blow the shell
The marriage over to declare
And now to forest-shades where dwell
The hermits, wend the wedded pair,
The doors of every house are hung
With gay festoons of leaves and flowers;
And blazing banners broad are flung,
And trumpets blown from castle towers!
Slow the procession makes its ground
Along the crowded city street:
And blessings in a storm of sound
At every step the couple greet.

Past all the houses, past the wall,
Past gardens gay, and hedgerows trim,
Past fields, where sinuous brooklets small
With molten silver to the brim
Glance in the sun's expiring light,
Past frowning hills, past pastures wild,
At last arises on the sight,
Foliage on foliage densely piled,

The woods primeval, where reside
The holy hermits;—henceforth here
Must live the fair and gentle bride:
But this thought brought with it no fear.

Fear! With her husband by her still?
Or weariness! Where all was new?
Hark! What a welcome from the hill!
There gathered are a hermits few.
Screaming the peacocks upward soar;
Wondering the timid wild deer gaze;
And from Briarean fig-trees hoar
Look down the monkeys in amaze
As the procession moves along;
And now behold, the bridegroom's sire
With joy comes forth amid the throng;—
What reverence his looks inspire!

Blind! With his partner by his side!
For them it was a hallowed time!
Warmly they greet the modest bride
With her dark eyes and front sublime!
One only grief they feel.—Shall she
Who dwelt in palace halls before,
Dwell in their huts beneath the tree?
Would not their hard life press her sore;—

The manual labour, and the want
Of comforts that her rank became,
Valkala robes, meals poor and scant,
All undermine the fragile frame?

To see the bride, the hermits' wives
And daughters gathered to the huts,
Women of pure and saintly lives!
And there beneath the betel-nuts
Tall trees like pillars, they admire
Her beauty, and congratulate
The parents, that their hearts' desire
Had thus accorded been by Fate,
And Satyavan their son had found,
In exile lone, a fitting mate:
And gossips add,—good signs abound;
Prosperity shall on her wait.

Good signs in features, limbs, and eyes,
That old experience can discern,
Good signs on earth and in the skies,
That it could read at every turn.
And now with rice and gold, all bless
The bride and bridegroom,—and they go
Happy in others' happiness,
Each to her home, beneath the glow

Of the late risen moon that lines
With silver all the ghost-like trees,
Sals, tamarisks, and South-Sea pines,
And palms whose plumes wave in the breeze.

False was the fear the parents felt,
Savitri liked her new life much;
Though in a lowly home she dwelt
Her conduct as a wife was such
As to illumine all the place;
She sickened not, nor sighed, nor pined;
But with simplicity and grace
Discharged each household duty kind.
Strong in all manual work,—and strong
To comfort, cherish, help, and pray,
The hours past peacefully along
And rippling bright, day followed day.

At morn Satyavan to the wood
Early repaired and gathered flowers
And fruits, in its wild solitude,
And fuel,—till advancing hours
Apprised him that his frugal meal
Awaited him. Ah, happy time!
Savitri, who with fervid zeal
Had said her orisons sublime,

And fed the Bramins and the birds,
Now ministered. Arcadian love,
With tender smiles and honeyed words,
All bliss of earth thou art above!

And yet there was a sceptre grim,
A skeleton in Savitri's heart,
Looming in shadow, somewhat dim,
But which would never thence depart.
It was that fatal, fatal speech
Of Narad Muni. As the days
Slipt smoothly past, each after each,
In private she more fervent prays.
But there is none to share her fears,
For how could she communicate
The sad cause of her hidden tears?
The doom approached, the fatal date.

No help from man. Well, be it so!
No sympathy,—it matters not!
God can avert the heavy blow!
He answers worship. Thus she thought.
And so, her prayers, by day and night,
Like incense rose unto the throne;
Nor did she vow neglect or rite
The Veds enjoin or helpful own.

Upon the fourteenth of the moon,
As nearer came the time of dread,
In Joystee, that is May or June,
She vowed her vows and Bramins fed.

And now she counted e'en the hours,
As to Eternity they past;
O'er head the dark cloud darker lowers,
The year is rounding full at last.
To-day,—to-day,—with doleful sound
The word seem'd in her ear to ring!
O breaking heart,—thy pain profound
Thy husband knows not, nor the king,
Exiled and blind, nor yet the queen;
But One knows in His place above.
To-day,—to-day,—it will be seen
Which shall be victor, Death or Love!

Incessant in her prayers from morn,
The noon is safely tided,—then
A gleam of faint, faint hope is born,
But the heart fluttered like a wren
That sees the shadow of the hawk
Sail on,—and trembles in affright,
Lest a downrushing swoop should mock
Its fortune, and o'erwhelm it quite.

The afternoon has come and gone
And brought no change;—should she rejoice?
The gentle evening's shades come on,
When hark!—She hears her husband's voice!

“The twilight is most beautiful!
Mother, to gather fruit I go,
And fuel,—for the air is cool,—
Expect me in an hour or so.”
“The night, my child, draws on apace,”
The mother's voice was heard to say,
“The forest paths are hard to trace
In darkness,—till the morrow stay.”
“Not hard for me, who can discern
The forest-paths in any hour,
Blindfold I could with ease return,
And day has not yet lost its power.”

“He goes then,” thought Savitri, “thus
With unseen bands Fate draws us on
Unto the place appointed us;
We feel no outward force,—anon
We go to marriage or to death
At a determined time and place;
We are her playthings; with her breath
She blows us where she lists in space.

What is my duty? It is clear,
My husband I must follow; so,
While he collects his forest gear
Let me permission get to go."

His sire she seeks,—the blind old king,
And asks from him permission straight.
"My daughter, night with ebon wing
Hovers above; the hour is late.
My son is active, brave, and strong,
Conversant with the woods, he knows
Each path; methinks it would be wrong
For thee to venture where he goes,
Weak and defenceless as thou art,
At such a time. If thou wert near
Thou might'st embarrass him, dear heart,
Alone, he would not have a fear."

So spake the hermit-monarch blind,
His wife too, entering in, exprest
The self-same thoughts in words as kind,
And begged Savitri hard, to rest.
"Thy recent fasts and vigils, child,
Make thee unfit to undertake
This journey to the forest wild."
But nothing could her purpose shake.

She urged the nature of her vows,
Required her now the rites were done
To follow where her loving spouse
Might e'en a chance of danger run.

“Go then, my child,—we give thee leave,
But with thy husband quick return,
Before the flickering shades of eve
Deepen to night, and planets burn,
And forest-paths become obscure,
Lit only by their doubtful rays.
The gods, who guard all women pure,
Bless thee and keep thee in thy ways,
And safely bring thee and thy lord!”
On this she left, and swiftly ran
Where with his saw in lieu of sword,
And basket, plodded Satyavan.

Oh, lovely are the woods at dawn,
And lovely in the sultry noon,
But loveliest, when the sun withdrawn
The twilight and a crescent moon
Change all asperities of shape,
And tone all colours softly down,
With a blue veil of silvered crape!
Lo! By that hill which palm-trees crown,

Down the deep glade with perfume rife
From buds that to the dews expand,
The husband and the faithful wife
Pass to dense jungle,—hand in hand.

Satyavan bears beside his saw
A forkèd stick to pluck the fruit,
His wife, the basket lined with straw;
He talks, but she is almost mute,
And very pale. The minutes pass;
The basket has no further space,
Now on the fruits they flowers amass
That with their red flush all the place
While twilight lingers; then for wood
He sees the branches of the trees,
The noise, heard in the solitude,
Grates on its soft, low harmonies.

And all the while one dreadful thought
Haunted Savitri's anxious mind,
Which would have fain its stress forgot;
It came as chainless as the wind,
Oft and again: thus on the spot
Marked with his heart-blood oft comes back
The murdered man, to see the clot!
Death's final blow,—the fatal wrack

Of every hope, whence will it fall?
For fall, by Narad's words, it must;
Persistent rising to appall
This thought its horrid presence thrust.

Sudden the noise is hushed,—a pause!
Satyavan lets the weapon drop—
Too well Savitri knows the cause,
He feels not well, the work must stop.
A pain is in his head,—a pain
As if he felt the cobra's fangs,
He tries to look around,—in vain,
A mist before his vision hangs;
The trees whirl dizzily around
In a fantastic fashion wild;
His throat and chest seem iron-bound,
He staggers, like a sleepy child.

“My head, my head!—Savitri, dear,
This pain is frightful. Let me lie
Here on the turf.” Her voice was clear
And very calm was her reply,
As if her heart had banished fear:
“Lean, love, thy head upon my breast,”
And as she helped him, added—“here,
So shalt thou better breathe and rest.”

“Ah me, this pain,—’tis getting dark,
I see no more,—can this be death?
What means this, gods?—Savitri, mark,
My hands wax cold, and fails my breath.”

“It may be but a swoon.” “Ah! no—
Arrows are piercing through my heart,—
Farewell my love! for I must go,
This, this is death.” He gave one start
And then lay quiet on her lap,
Insensible to sight and sound,
Breathing his last. . . . The branches flap
And fireflies glimmer all around;
His head upon her breast; his frame
Part on her lap, part on the ground,
Thus lies he. Hours pass. Still the same,
The pair look statues, magic-bound.

PART III

Death in his palace holds his court,
His messengers move to and fro,
Each of his mission makes report,
And takes the royal orders,—Lo,
Some slow before his throne appear
And humbly in the Presence kneel:
“Why hath the Prince not been brought here?
The hour is past; nor is appeal
Allowed against foregone decree;
There is the mandate with the seal!
How comes it ye return to me
Without him? Shame upon your zeal!”

“O King, whom all men fear,—he lies
Deep in the dark Medhya wood,
We fled from thence in wild surprise,
And left him in that solitude.
We dared not touch him, for there sits,
Beside him, lighting all the place,
A woman fair, whose brow permits
In its austerity of grace

And purity,—no creatures foul
As we seemed, by her loveliness,
Or soul of evil, ghost or ghoul,
To venture close, and far, far less

To stretch a hand, and bear the dead;
We left her leaning on her hand,
Thoughtful; no tear-drop had she shed,
But looked the goddess of the land,
With her meek air of mind command.”—

“Then on this errand I must go
Myself, and bear my dreaded brand,
This duty unto Fate I owe;
I know the merits of the prince,
But merit saves not from the doom
Common to man; his death long since
Was destined in his beauty’s bloom.”

PART IV

As still Savitri sat beside
Her husband dying,—dying fast,
She saw a stranger slowly glide
Beneath the boughs that shrunk aghast.
Upon his head he wore a crown
That shimmered in the doubtful light;
His vestment scarlet reached low down,
His waist, a golden girdle dight.
His skin was dark as bronze; his face
Irradiate, and yet severe;
His eyes had much of love and grace,
But glowed so bright, they filled with fear.

A string was in the stranger's hand
Noosed at its end. Her terrors now
Savitri scarcely could command.
Upon the sod beneath a bough,
She gently laid her husband's head,
And in obeisance bent her brow.
“No mortal form is thine,”—she said,
“Beseech thee say what god art thou?”

And what can be thine errand here?"

"Savitri, for thy prayers, thy faith,
Thy frequent vows, thy fasts severe,
I answer,—list,—my name is Death.

"And I am come myself to take
Thy husband from this earth away,
And he shall cross the doleful lake
In my own charge, and let me say
To few such honours I accord,
But his pure life and thine require
No less from me." The dreadful sword
Like lightning glanced one moment dire;
And then the inner man was tied,
The soul no bigger than the thumb,
To be borne onwards by his side:—
Savitri all the while stood dumb.

But when the god moved slowly on
To gain his own dominions dim,
Leaving the body there—anon
Savitri meekly followed him,
Hoping against all hope; he turned
And looked surprised. "Go back, my child!"
Pale, pale the stars above them burned,
More weird the scene had grown and wild;

“It is not for the living—hear!
To follow where the dead must go,
Thy duty lies before thee clear,
What thou shouldst do, the Shasters show.

“The funeral rites that they ordain
And sacrifices must take up
Thy first sad moments; not in vain
Is held to thee this bitter cup;
Its lessons thou shalt learn in time!
All that thou *canst* do, thou hast done
For thy dear lord. Thy love sublime
My deepest sympathy hath won.
Return, for thou hast come as far
As living creature may. Adieu!
Let duty be thy guiding star,
As ever. To thyself be true!”

“Where’er my husband dear is led,
Or journeys of his own free will,
I too must go, though darkness spread
Across my path, portending ill,
’Tis thus my duty I have read!
If I am wrong, oh! with me bear;
But do not bid me backward tread
My way forlorn,—for I can dare

All things but that; ah! pity me,
A woman frail, too sorely tried!
And let me, let me follow thee,
O gracious god,—whate'er betide.

“By all things sacred, I entreat,
By Penitence that purifies,
By prompt Obedience, full, complete,
To spiritual masters, in the eyes
Of gods so precious, by the love
I bear my husband, by the faith
That looks from earth to heaven above,
And by thy own great name, O Death,
And all thy kindness, bid me not
To leave thee, and to go my way,
But let me follow as I ought
Thy steps and his, as best I may.

“I know that in this transient world
All is delusion,—nothing true;
I know its shows are mists unfurled
To please and vanish. To renew
Its bubble joys, be magic bound
In *Maya's* network frail and fair,
Is not my aim! The gladsome sound
Of husband, brother, friend, is air

To such as know that all must die,
And that at last the time must come,
When eye shall speak no more to eye
And Love cry,—Lo, this is my sum.

“I know in such a world as this
No one can gain his heart’s desire,
Or pass the years in perfect bliss;
Like gold we must be tried by fire;
And each shall suffer as he acts
And thinks,—his own sad burden bear!
No friends can help,—his sins are facts
That nothing can annul or square,
And he must bear their consequence.
Can I my husband save by rites?
Ah, no,—that were a vain pretence,
Justice eternal strict requites.

“He for his deeds shall get his due
As I for mine: thus here each soul
Is its own friend if it pursue
The right, and run straight for the goal;
But its own worst and direst foe
If it choose evil, and in tracks
Forbidden, for its pleasure go.
Who knows not this, true wisdom lacks,

Virtue should be the aim and end
Of every life, all else is vain,
Duty should be its dearest friend
If higher life it would attain."

"So sweet thy words ring on mine ear,
Gentle Savitri, that I fain
Would give some sign to make it clear
Thou hast not prayed to me in vain.
Satyavan's life I may not grant,
Nor take before its term thy life,
But I am not all adamant,
I feel for thee, thou faithful wife!
Ask thou aught else, and let it be
Some good thing for thyself or thine,
And I shall give it, child, to thee,
If any power on earth be mine."

"Well, be it so. My husband's sire
Hath lost his sight and fair domain,
Give to his eyes their former fire,
And place him on his throne again."
"It shall be done. Go back, my child,
The hour wears late, the wind feels cold,
The path becomes more weird and wild,
Thy feet are torn, there's blood, behold!

Thou feelest faint from weariness,
Oh try to follow me no more;
Go home, and with thy presence bless
Those who thine absence there deplore.”

“No weariness, O Death, I feel,
And how should I, when by the side
Of Satyavan? In woe and weal
To be a helpmate swears the bride.
This is my place; by solemn oath
Wherever thou conductest him
I too must go, to keep my troth;
And if the eye at times should brim,
’Tis human weakness, give me strength
My work appointed to fulfil,
That I may gain the crown at length
The gods give those who do their will.

“The power of goodness is so great
We pray to feel its influence
For ever on us. It is late,
And the strange landscape awes my sense;
But I would fain with thee go on,
And hear thy voice so true and kind;
The false lights that on objects shone
Have vanished, and no longer blind,

Thanks to thy simple presence. Now
I feel a fresher air around,
And see the glory of that brow
With flashing rubies fitly crowned.

“Men call thee Yama—conqueror,
Because it is against their will
They follow thee,—and they abhor
The Truth which thou wouldst aye instil.
If they thy nature knew aright,
O god, all other gods above!
And that thou conquerest in the fight
By patience, kindness, mercy, love,
And not by devastating wrath,
They would not shrink in childlike fright
To see thy shadow on their path,
But hail thee as sick souls the light.”

“Thy words, Savitri, greet mine ear
As sweet as founts that murmur low
To one who in the deserts drear
With parchèd tongue moves faint and slow,
Because thy talk is heart-sincere,
Without hypocrisy or guile;
Demand another boon, my dear,
But not of those forbad erewhile,

And I shall grant it, ere we part:
Lô, the stars pale,—the way is long,
Receive thy boon, and homewards start,
For ah, poor child, thou art not strong.”

“Another boon! My sire the king
Beside myself hath children none,
Oh grant that from his stock may spring
A hundred boughs.” “It shall be done.
He shall be blest with many a son
Who his old palace shall rejoice.”
“Each heart-wish from thy goodness won,
If I am still allowed a choice,
I fain thy voice would ever hear,
Reluctant am I still to part,
The way seems short when thou art near
And Satyavan, my heart’s dear heart.

“Of all the pleasures given on earth
The company of the good is best,
For weariness has never birth
In such a commerce sweet and blest;
The sun runs on its wonted course,
The earth its plenteous treasure yields,
All for their sake, and by the force
Their prayer united ever wields.

Oh let me, let me ever dwell
Amidst the good, where'er it be,
Whether in lowly hermit-cell
Or in some spot beyond the sea.

“The favours man accords to men
Are never fruitless, from them rise
A thousand acts beyond our ken
That float like incense to the skies;
For benefits can ne'er efface,
They multiply and widely spread,
And honour follows on their trace.
Sharp penances, and vigils dread,
Austerities, and wasting fasts,
Create an empire, and the blest
Long as this spiritual empire lasts
Become the saviours of the rest.”

“O thou endowed with every grace
And every virtue,—thou whose soul
Appears upon thy lovely face,
May the great gods who all control
Send thee their peace. I too would give
One favour more before I go;
Ask something for thyself, and live
Happy, and dear to all below,

Till summoned to the bliss above.

Savitri ask, and ask unblamed.”—

She took the clue, felt Death was Love,

For no exceptions now he named,

And boldly said,—“Thou knowest, Lord,

The inmost hearts and thoughts of all!

There is no need to utter word,

Upon thy mercy sole, I call.

If speech be needful to obtain

Thy grace,—oh hear a wife forlorn,

Let my Satyavan live again

And children unto us be born,

Wise, brave, and valiant.” “From thy stock

A hundred families shall spring

As lasting as the solid rock,

Each son of thine shall be a king.”

As thus he spoke, he loosed the knot

The soul of Satyavan that bound,

And promised further that their lot

In pleasant places should be found

Thenceforth, and that they both should live

Four centuries, to which the name

Of fair Savitri, men would give,—

And then he vanished in a flame.

“Adieu, great god!” She took the soul,
No bigger than the human thumb,
And running swift, soon reached her goal,
Where lay the body stark and dumb.

She lifted it with eager hands
And as before, when he expired,
She placed the head upon the bands
That bound her breast which hope new fired
And which alternate rose and fell;
Then placed his soul upon his heart
Where like a bee it found its cell,
And lo, he woke with sudden start!
His breath came low at first, then deep,
With an unquiet look he gazed,
As one awaking from a sleep
Wholly bewildered and amazed.

PART V

As consciousness came slowly back
He recognised his loving wife—
“Who was it, Love, through regions black
Where hardly seemed a sign of life
Carried me bound? Methinks I view
The dark face yet—a noble face,
He had a robe of scarlet hue,
And ruby crown; far, far through space
He bore me, on and on, but now,”—
“Thou hast been sleeping, but the man
With glory on his kingly brow,
Is gone, thou seest, Satyavan!

“O my beloved,—thou art free!
Sleep which had bound thee fast, hath left
Thine eyelids. Try thyself to be!
For late of every sense bereft
Thou seemedst in a rigid trance;
And if thou canst, my love, arise
Regard the night, the dark expanse
Spread out before us, and the skies.”

Supported by her, looked he long
Upon the landscape dim outspread,
And like some old remembered song
The past came back,—a tangled thread.

“I had a pain, as if an asp
Gnawed in my brain, and there I lay
Silent, for oh! I could but gasp,
Till someone came that bore away
My spirit into lands unknown:
Thou, dear, who watchedst beside me,—say
Was it a dream from elfland blown,
Or very truth,—my doubts to stay.”
“O Love, look round,—how strange and dread
The shadows of the high trees fall,
Homeward our path now let us tread,
To-morrow I shall tell thee all.

“Arise! Be strong! Gird up thy loins!
Think of our parents, dearest friend!
The solemn darkness haste enjoins,
Not likely is it soon to end.
Hark! Jackals still at distance howl,
The day, long, long will not appear,
Lo, wild fierce eyes through bushes scowl,
Summon thy courage, lest I fear.

Was that the tiger's sullen growl?
What means this rush of many feet?
Can creatures wild so near us prowl?
Rise up, and hasten homewards, sweet!"

He rose, but could not find the track,
And then, too well, Savitri knew
His wonted force had not come back.
She made a fire, and from the dew
Essayed to shelter him. At last
He nearly was himself again,—
Then vividly rose all the past,
And with the past, new fear and pain.
"What anguish must my parents feel
Who wait for me the livelong hours!
Their sore wound let us haste to heal
Before it festers, past our powers:

"For broken-hearted, they may die!
Oh hasten, dear,—now I am strong,
No more I suffer, let us fly,
Ah me! each minute seems so long.
They told me once, they could not live,
Without me, in their feeble age,
Their food and water I must give
And help them in the last sad stage

Of earthly life, and that Beyond
In which a son can help by rites.
Oh what a love is theirs—how fond!
Whom now Despair, perhaps, benights.

“Infirm herself, my mother dear
Now guides, methinks, the tottering feet
Of my blind father, for they hear
And hasten eagerly to meet
Our fancied steps. O faithful wife,
Let us on wings fly back again,
Upon their safety hangs my life!”
He tried his feelings to restrain,
But like some river swelling high
They swept their barriers weak and vain,
Sudden there burst a fearful cry,
Then followed tears—like autumn rain.

Hush! Hark, a sweet voice rises clear!
A voice of earnestness intense,
“If I have worshipped Thee in fear
And duly paid with reverence
The solemn sacrifices,—hear!
Send consolation, and Thy peace
Eternal, to our parents dear,
That their anxieties may cease.

Oh, ever have I loved Thy truth,
Therefore on Thee I dare to call,
Help us, this night, and them, for sooth
Without Thy help, we perish all."

She took in hers Satyavan's hand,
She gently wiped his falling tears,
"This weakness, Love, I understand!
Courage!" She smiled away his fears.
"Now we shall go, for thou art strong."
She helped him rise up by her side
And led him like a child along,
He wistfully the basket eyed
Laden with fruit and flowers. "Not now,
To-morrow we shall fetch it hence."
And so, she hung it on a bough,
"I'll bear thy saw for our defence."

In one fair hand the saw she took,
The other with a charming grace
She twined around him, and her look
She turned upwards to his face.
Thus aiding him she felt anew
His bosom beat against her own—
More firm his step, more clear his view,
More self-possessed his words and tone

Became, as swift the minutes past,
And now the pathway he discerns,
And 'neath the trees they hurry fast,
For Hope's fair light before them burns.

Under the faint beams of the stars
How beautiful appeared the flowers,
Light scarlet, flecked with golden bars
Of the palâsas,¹ in the bowers
That nature there herself had made
Without the aid of man. At times
Trees on their path cast densest shade,
And nightingales sang mystic rhymes
Their fears and sorrows to assuage.
Where two paths met, the north they chose,
As leading to the hermitage,
And soon before them dim it rose.

Here let us end. For all may guess
The blind old king received his sight,
And ruled again with gentleness
The country that was his by right;
And that Savitri's royal sire
Was blest with many sons,—a race

¹ *Butea frondosa*

Whom poets praised for martial fire,
And every peaceful gift and grace.
As for Savitri, to this day
Her name is named, when couples wed,
And to the bride the parents say,
Be thou like her, in heart and head.

II

LAKSHMAN

“Hark ! Lakshman ! Hark, again that cry !
It is,—it is my husband’s voice !
Oh hasten, to his succour fly,
No more hast thou, dear friend, a choice.
He calls on thee, perhaps his foes
Environ him on all sides round,
That wail,—it means death’s final throes !
Why standest thou, as magic-bound?

—
“Is this a time for thought,—oh gird
Thy bright sword on, and take thy bow !
He heeds not, hears not any word,
Evil hangs over us, I know !
Swift in decision, prompt in deed,
Brave unto rashness, can this be,
The man to whom all looked at need?
Is it my brother that I see !

“Ah no, and I must run alone,
For further here I cannot stay;
Art thou transformed to blind dumb stone !
Wherefore this impious, strange delay !
That cry,—that cry,—it seems to ring
Still in my ears,—I cannot bear
Suspense; if help we fail to bring
His death at least we both can share.”

“Oh calm thyself, Videhan Queen,
No cause is there for any fear,
Hast thou his prowess never seen?
Wipe off for shame that dastard tear !
What being of demonian birth
Could ever brave his mighty arm?
Is there a creature on the earth
That dares to work our hero harm?

“The lion and the grisly bear
Cower when they see his royal look,
Sun-staring eagles of the air
His glance of anger cannot brook,
Python and cobras at his tread
To their most secret coverts glide,
Bowed to the dust each serpent head
Erect before in hooded pride.

“Rakshases, Danavs, demons, ghosts,
Acknowledge in their hearts his might,
And slink to their remotest coasts,
In terror at his very sight.
Evil to him ! Oh fear it not,
Whatever foes against him rise !
Banish for aye the foolish thought,
And be thyself,—bold, great, and wise.

“He call for help ! Canst thou believe
He like a child would shriek for aid
Or pray for respite or reprieve—
Not of such metal is he made !
Delusive was that piercing cry,—
Some trick of magic by the foe;
He has a work,—he cannot die,
Beseech me not from hence to go.

“For here beside thee, as a guard
’Twas he commanded me to stay,
And dangers with my life to ward
If they should come across thy way.
Send me not hence, for in this wood
Bands scattered of the giants lurk,
Who on their wrongs and vengeance brood,
And wait the hour their will to work.”

“Oh shame ! And canst thou make my weal
A plea for lingering ! Now I know
What thou art, Lakshman ! And I feel
Far better were an open foe.
Art thou a coward ? I have seen
Thy bearing in the battle-fray
Where flew the death-fraught arrows keen,
Else had I judged thee so to-day.

“But then thy leader stood beside !
Dazzles the cloud when shines the sun,
Reft of his radiance, see it glide
A shapeless mass of vapours dun;
So of thy courage,—or if not,
The matter is far darker dyed,
What makes thee loth to leave this spot ?
Is there a motive thou wouldst hide ?

“He perishes—well, let him die !
His wife henceforth shall be mine own !
Can that thought deep imbedded lie
Within thy heart’s most secret zone !
Search well and see ! one brother takes
His kingdom,—one would take his wife !
A fair partition !—But it makes
Me shudder, and abhor my life.

“Art thou in secret league with those
Who from his hope the kingdom rent?
A spy from his ignoble foes
To track him in his banishment?
And wouldst thou at his death rejoice?
I know thou wouldst, or sure ere now
When first thou heardest that well-known voice
Thou shouldst have run to aid, I trow.

“Learn this,—whatever comes may come,
But I shall not survive my Love,—
Of all my thoughts here is the sum !
Witness it gods in heaven above.
If fire can burn, or water drown,
I follow him:—choose what thou wilt,
Truth with its everlasting crown,
Or falsehood, treachery, and guilt.

“Remain here, with a vain pretence
Of shielding me from wrong and shame,
Or go and die in his defence
And leave behind a noble name.
Choose what thou wilt,—I urge no more,
My pathway lies before me clear,
I did not know thy mind before,
I know thee now,—and have no fear.”

She said and proudly from him turned,—
Was this the gentle Sîta? No.
Flames from her eyes shot forth and burned,
The tears therein had ceased to flow.
“Hear me, O Queen, ere I depart,
No longer can I bear thy words,
They lacerate my inmost heart
And torture me, like poisoned swords.

“Have I deserved this at thine hand?
Of lifelong loyalty and truth
Is this the meed? I understand
Thy feelings, Sîta, and in sooth
I blame thee not,—but thou mightst be
Less rash in judgement. Look! I go,
Little I care what comes to me
Wert thou but safe,—God keep thee so!

“In going hence I disregard
The plainest orders of my chief,
A deed for me,—a soldier,—hard
And deeply painful, but thy grief
And language, wild and wrong, allow
No other course. Mine be the crime,
And mine alone,—but oh, do thou
Think better of me from this time.

“Here with an arrow, lo, I trace
A magic circle ere I leave,
No evil thing within this space
May come to harm thee or to grieve.
Step not, for aught, across the line,
Whatever thou mayst see or hear,
So shalt thou balk the bad design
Of every enemy I fear.

“And now farewell ! What thou hast said,
Though it has broken quite my heart,
So that I wish that I were dead—
I would before, O Queen, we part,
Freely forgive, for well I know
That grief and fear have made thee wild,
We part as friends,—is it not so?”
And speaking thus,—he sadly smiled.

“And oh ye sylvan gods that dwell
Among these dim and sombre shades,
Whose voices in the breezes swell
And blend with noises of cascades,
Watch over Sîta, whom alone
I leave, and keep her safe from harm,
Till we return unto our own,
I and my brother, arm in arm.

“For though ill omens round us rise
And frighten her dear heart, I feel
That he is safe. Beneath the skies
His equal is not,—and his heel
Shall tread all adversaries down,
Whoever they may chance to be.—
Farewell, O Sîta ! Blessings crown
And Peace for ever rest with thee !”

He said, and straight his weapons took
His bow and arrows pointed keen,
Kind,—nay, indulgent,—was his look,
No trace of anger there was seen,
Only a sorrow dark, that seemed
To deepen his resolve to dare
All dangers. Hoarse the vulture screamed,
As out he strode with dauntless air.

III

JOGADHYA UMA

“Shell-bracelets ho ! Shell-bracelets ho !
Fair maids and matrons come and buy !”
Along the road, in morning’s glow,
The pedlar raised his wonted cry.
The road ran straight, a red, red line,
To Khirogram, for cream renowned,
Through pasture-meadows where the kine,
In knee-deep grass, stood magic bound
And half awake, involved in mist,
That floated in dun coils profound,
Till by the sudden sunbeams kist
Rich rainbow hues broke all around.

“Shell-bracelets ho ! Shell-bracelets ho !”
The roadside trees still dripped with dew,
And hung their blossoms like a show.
Who heard the cry? ‘Twas but a few.

A ragged herd-boy, here and there,
With his long stick and naked feet;
A ploughman wending to his care,
The field from which he hopes the wheat;
An early traveller, hurrying fast
To the next town; an urchin slow
Bound for the school; these heard and past,
Unheeding all,—“Shell-bracelets ho !”

Pellucid spread a lake-like tank
Beside the road now lonelier still,
High on three sides arose the bank
Which fruit-trees shadowed at their will;
Upon the fourth side was the Ghat,
With its broad stairs of marble white,
And at the entrance-arch there sat,
Full face against the morning light,
A fair young woman with large eyes,
And dark hair falling to her zone,
She heard the pedlar's cry arise,
And eager seemed his ware to own.

“Shell-bracelets ho ! See, maiden, see !
The rich enamel sunbeam-kist !
Happy, oh happy, shalt thou be,
Let them but clasp that slender wrist;

These bracelets are a mighty charm,
They keep a lover ever true,
And widowhood avert, and harm,
Buy them, and thou shalt never rue.
Just try them on !”—She stretched her hand,
“Oh what a nice and lovely fit !
No fairer hand, in all the land,
And lo ! the bracelet matches it.”

Dazzled the pedlar on her gazed
Till came the shadow of a fear,
While she the bracelet arm upraised
Against the sun to view more clear.
Oh she was lovely, but her look
Had something of a high command
That filled with awe. Aside she shook
Intruding curls by breezes fanned
And blown across her brows and face,
And asked the price, which when she heard
She nodded, and with quiet grace
For payment to her home referred.

“And where, O maiden, is thy house?
But no, that wrist-ring has a tongue,
No maiden art thou, but a spouse,
Happy, and rich, and fair, and young.”

“For otherwise, my lord is poor,
And him at home thou shalt not find;
Ask for my father; at the door
Knock loudly; he is deaf, but kind.
Seest thou that lofty gilded spire
Above these tufts of foliage green?
That is our place; its point of fire
Will guide thee o’er the tract between.”

“That is the temple spire.”—“Yes, there
We live; my father is the priest,
The manse is near, a building fair
But lowly, to the temple’s east.
When thou hast knocked, and seen him, say,
His daughter, at Dhamaser Ghat,
Shell-bracelets bought from thee to-day,
And he must pay so much for that.
Be sure; he will not let thee pass
Without the value, and a meal,
If he demur, or cry alas !
No money hath he,—then reveal,

“Within the small box, marked with streaks
Of bright vermilion, by the shrine,
The key whereof has lain for weeks
Untouched, he’ll find some coin,—’tis mine.

That will enable him to pay

The bracelet's price, now fare thee well !”

She spoke, the pedlar went away,

Charmed with her voice, as by some spell;
While she, left lonely there, prepared

To plunge into the water pure,

And like a rose her beauty bared,

From all observance quite secure.

Not weak she seemed, nor delicate,

Strong was each limb of flexile grace,

And full the bust; the mien elate,

Like hers, the goddess of the chase
On Latmos hill,—and oh, the face

Framed in its cloud of floating hair,
No painter's hand might hope to trace

The beauty and the glory there !

Well might the pedlar look with awe,

For though her eyes were soft, a ray
Lit them at times, which kings who saw
Would never dare to disobey.

Onwards through groves the pedlar sped

Till full in front the sunlit spire

Arose before him. Paths which led

To gardens trim in gay attire

Lay all around. And lo ! the manse,
Humble but neat with open door !
He paused, and blest the lucky chance
That brought his bark to such a shore.
Huge straw ricks, log huts full of grain,
Sleek cattle, flowers, a tinkling bell,
Spoke in a language sweet and plain,
“Here smiling Peace and Plenty dwell.”

Unconsciously he raised his cry,
“Shell-bracelets ho !” And at his voice
Looked out the priest, with eager eye,
And made his heart at once rejoice.
“Ho *Sunkha* pedlar ! Pass not by,
But step thou in, and share the food
Just offered on our altar high,
If thou art in a hungry mood.
Welcome are all to this repast !
The rich and poor, the high and low !
Come, wash thy feet, and break thy fast,
Then on thy journey strengthened go.”

“Oh thanks, good priest ! Observance due
And greetings ! May thy name be blest !
I came on business, but I knew,
Here might be had both food and rest

Without a charge; for all the poor
Ten miles around thy sacred shrine
Know that thou keepest open door,
And praise that generous hand of thine:
But let my errand first be told,
For bracelets sold to thine this day,
So much thou owest me in gold,
Hast thou the ready cash to pay?

“The bracelets were enamelled,—so
The price is high.”—“How ! Sold to mine?
Who bought them, I should like to know.”

“Thy daughter, with the large black eyne,
Now bathing at the marble ghat.”

Loud laughed the priest at this reply,
“I shall not put up, friend, with that;

No daughter in the world have I,
An only son is all my stay;
Some minx has played a trick, no doubt,
But cheer up, let thy heart be gay.
Be sure that I shall find her out.”

“Nay, nay, good father, such a face
Could not deceive, I must aver;
At all events, she knows thy place,
‘And if my father should demur

To pay thee,—thus she said,—‘or cry
He has no money, tell him straight
The box vermilion-streaked to try,
That’s near the shrine.’ ” “Well, wait, friend,
wait !”

The priest said thoughtful, and he ran
And with the open box came back,
“Here is the price exact, my man,
No surplus over, and no lack.

“How strange ! how strange ! Oh blest art thou
To have beheld her, touched her hand,
Before whom Vishnu’s self must bow,
And Brahma and his heavenly band !
Here have I worshipped her for years
And never seen the vision bright;
Vigils and fasts and secret tears
Have almost quenched my outward sight;
And yet that dazzling form and face
I have not seen, and thou, dear friend,
To thee, unsought for, comes the grace,
What may its purport be, and end?

“How strange ! How strange ! Oh happy thou !
And could thou ask no other boon
Than thy poor bracelet’s price ? That brow
Resplendent as the autumn moon

Must have bewildered thee, I trow,
And made thee lose thy senses all.”
A dim light on the pedlar now
Began to dawn; and he let fall
His bracelet basket in his haste,
And backward ran the way he came;
What meant the vision fair and chaste,
Whose eyes were they,—those eyes of flame?

Swift ran the pedlar as a hind,
The old priest followed on his trace,
They reached the Ghat but could not find
The lady of the noble face.
The birds were silent in the wood,
The lotus flowers exhaled a smell
Faint, over all the solitude,
A heron as a sentinel
Stood by the bank. They called,—in vain,
No answer came from hill or fell,
The landscape lay in slumber's chain,
E'en Echo slept within her cell.

Broad sunshine, yet a hush profound !
They turned with saddened hearts to go;
Then from afar there came a sound
Of silver bells; —the priest said low,

“O Mother, Mother, deign to hear,
The worship-hour has rung; we wait
In meek humility and fear.
Must we return home desolate?
Oh come, as late thou cam'st unsought,
Or was it but an idle dream?
Give us some sign if it was not,
A word, a breath, or passing gleam.”

Sudden from out the water sprung
A rounded arm, on which they saw
As high the lotus buds among
It rose, the bracelet white, with awe.
Then a wide ripple tost and swung
The blossoms on that liquid plain,
And lo ! the arm so fair and young
Sank in the waters down again.
They bowed before the mystic Power,
And as they home returned in thought,
Each took from thence a lotus flower
In memory of the day and spot.

Years, centuries, have passed away,
And still before the temple shrine
Descendants of the pedlar pay
Shell-bracelets of the old design

As annual tribute. Much they own
In lands and gold,—but they confess
From that eventful day alone

Dawned on their industry,—success. . . .
Absurd may be the tale I tell,
Ill-suited to the marching times,
I loved the lips from which it fell,
So let it stand among my rhymes.

IV

THE ROYAL ASCETIC AND THE
HIND

From the Vishnu Purana. B. II. Chap. XIII

MAITREYA. Of old thou gav'st a promise to
relate
The deeds of Bharat, that great hermit-king:
Beloved Master, now the occasion suits,
And I am all attention.

PARASARA. Brahman, hear.
With a mind fixed intently on his gods
Long reigned in Saligram of ancient fame,
The mighty monarch of the wide, wide world.
Chief of the virtuous, never in his life
Harmed he, or strove to harm, his fellow-man,
Or any creature sentient. But he left
His kingdom in the forest-shades to dwell,
And changed his sceptre for a hermit's staff,
And with ascetic rites, privations rude,
And constant prayers, endeavoured to attain

Perfect dominion on his soul. At morn,
Fuel, and flowers, and fruit, and holy grass,
He gathered for oblations; and he passed
In stern devotions all his other hours;
Of the world heedless, and its myriad cares,
And heedless too of wealth, and love, and fame.

Once on a time, while living thus, he went
To bathe where through the wood the river flows:
And his ablutions done, he sat him down
Upon the shelving bank to muse and pray.
Thither impelled by thirst a graceful hind,
Big with its young, came fearlessly to drink.
Sudden, while yet she drank, the lion's roar,
Feared by all creatures, like a thunder-clap
Burst in that solitude from a thicket nigh.
Startled, the hind leapt up, and from her womb
Her offspring tumbled in the rushing stream.
Whelmed by the hissing waves and carried far
By the strong current swol'n by recent rain,
The tiny thing still struggled for its life,
While its poor mother, in her fright and pain,
Fell down upon the bank, and breathed her last.
Up rose the hermit-monarch at the sight
Full of keen anguish; with his pilgrim staff

He drew the new born creature from the wave;
'Twas panting fast, but life was in it still.
Now, as he saw its luckless mother dead,
He would not leave it in the woods alone,
But with the tenderest pity brought it home.

There, in his leafy hut, he gave it food,
And daily nourished it with patient care,
Until it grew in stature and in strength,
And to the forest skirts could venture forth
In search of sustenance. At early morn
Thenceforth it used to leave the hermitage
And with the shades of evening come again,
And in the little courtyard of the hut
Lie down in peace, unless the tigers fierce,
Prowling about, compelled it to return
Earlier at noon. But whether near or far,
Wandering abroad, or resting in its home,
The monarch-hermit's heart was with it still,
Bound by affection's ties; nor could he think
Of anything besides this little hind,
His nursling. Though a kingdom he had left,
And children, and a host of loving friends,
Almost without a tear, the fount of love
Sprang out anew within his blighted heart,

To greet this dumb, weak, helpless foster-child,
And so, when'er it lingered in the wilds,
Or at the 'customed hour could not return,
His thoughts went with it; "And alas !" he cried,
"Who knows, perhaps some lion or some wolf,
Or ravenous tiger with relentless jaws
Already hath devoured it,—timid thing !
Lo, how the earth is dinted with its hoofs,
And variegated. Surely for my joy
It was created. When will it come back,
And rub its budding antlers on my arms
In token of its love and deep delight
To see my face? The shaven stalks of grass,
Kusha and kasha, by its new teeth clipped,
Remind me of it, as they stand in lines
Like pious boys who chant the Samga Veds
Shorn by their vows of all their wealth of hair."
Thus passed the monarch-hermit's time; in joy,
With smiles upon his lips, whenever near
His little favourite; in bitter grief
And fear, and trouble, when it wandered far.
And he who had abandoned ease and wealth,
And friends and dearest ties, and kingly power,
Found his devotions broken by the love
He had bestowed upon a little hind
Thrown in his way by chance. Years glided on...

And Death, who spareth none, approached at last
The hermit-king to summon him away;
The hind was at his side, with tearful eyes
Watching his last sad moments, like a child
Beside a father. He too, watched and watched
His favourite through a blinding film of tears,
And could not think of the Beyond at hand,
So keen he felt the parting, such deep grief
O'erwhelmed him for the creature he had reared.
To it devoted was his last, last thought,
Reckless of present and of future both !

Thus far the pious chronicle, writ of old
By Brahman sage; but we, who happier, live
Under the holiest dispensation, know
That God is Love, and not to be adored
By a devotion born of stoic pride,
Or with ascetic rites, or penance hard,
But with a love, in character akin
To His unselfish, all-including love.
And therefore little can we sympathize
With what the Brahman sage would fain imply
As the concluding moral of his tale,
That for the hermit-king it was a sin
To love his nursling. What ! a sin to love !
A sin to pity ! Rather should we deem

Whatever Brahmans wise, or monks may hold,
That he had sinned in *casting off* all love
By his retirement to the forest-shades;
For that was to abandon duties high,
And, like a recreant soldier, leave the post
Where God had placed him as a sentinel.

This little hind-brought strangely on his path,
This love engendered in his withered heart,
This hindrance to his rituals,—might these not
Have been ordained to teach him? Call him back
To ways marked out for him by Love divine?
And with a mind less self-willed to adore?

Not in seclusion, not apart from all,
Not in a place elected for its peace,
But in the heat and bustle of the world,
'Mid sorrow, sickness, suffering and sin,
Must he still labour with a loving soul
Who strives to enter through the narrow gate.

V

THE LEGEND OF DHURVA

Visbnu Purana. Book I. Chap. XI

Sprung from great Brahma, Manu had two sons,
Heroic and devout, as I have said,
Pryavrata and Uttanapado;—names
Known in legends; and of these the last
Married two wives, Suruchee, his adored,
The mother of a handsome petted boy
Uttama; and Suneetee, less beloved,
The mother of another son whose name
Was Dhruva. Seated on his throne the king
Uttanapado, on his knee one day
Had placed Uttama; Dhruva, who beheld
His brother in that place of honour, longed
To clamber up and by his playmate sit;
Led on by Love he came, but found, alas !
Scant welcome and encouragement; the king
Saw fair Suruchee sweep into the hall
With stately step,—aye, every inch a queen,

And dared not smile upon her co-wife's son.
Observing him,—her rival's boy,—intent
To mount ambitious to his father's knee,
Where sat her own, thus fair Suruchee spake:
“Why hast thou, child, formed such a vain
design?

Why harboured such an aspiration proud,
Born from another's womb and not from mine?
Oh thoughtless ! To desire the loftiest place,
The throne of thrones, a royal father's lap !
It is an honour to the destined given,
And not within thy reach. What though thou art
Born of the king; those sleek and tender limbs
Hold of my blood no portion; I am queen.
To be the equal of mine only son
Were in thee vain ambition. Know'st thou not,
Fair prattler, thou art sprung,—not, not from
mine,
But from Suneetee's bowels? Learn thy place.”

Repulsed in silence from his father's lap,
Indignant, furious, at the words that fell
From his step-mother's lips, poor Dhruva ran
To his own mother's chambers, where he stood
Beside her with his pale, thin, trembling lips,

(Trembling with an emotion ill-suppressed)
And hair in wild disorder, till she took
And raised him to her lap, and gently said:
“Oh, child, what means this? What can be the
cause
Of this great anger? Who hath given thee pain?
He that hath vexed thee, hath despised thy sire,
For in these veins thou hast the royal blood.”

Thus conjured, Dhruva, with a swelling heart
Repeated to his mother every word
That proud Suruchee spake, from first to last,
Even in the very presence of the king.

His speech oft broken by his tears and sobs,
Helpless Suneetee, languid-eyed from care,
Heard sighing deeply, and then soft replied:
“Oh son, to lowly fortune thou wert born,
And what my co-wife said to thee is truth;
No enemy to Heaven's favoured ones may say
Such words as thy step-mother said to thee.
Yet, son, it is not meet that thou shouldst grieve
Or vex thy soul. The deeds that thou hast done,
The evil, haply, in some former life,
Long, long ago, who may alas ! annul,

Or who the good works not done, supplement !
The sins of previous lives must bear their fruit.
The ivory throne, the umbrella of gold,
The best steed, and the royal elephant
Rich caparisoned, must be his by right
Who has deserved them by his virtuous acts
In times long past. Oh think on this, my son,
And be content. For glorious actions done
Not in this life, but in some previous birth,
Suruchee by the monarch is beloved.
Women, unfortunate like myself, who bear
Only the name of wife without the powers,
But pine and suffer for our ancient sins.
Suruchee raised her virtues pile on pile,
Hence Uttama her son, the fortunate !
Suneetee heaped but evil,—hence her son
Dhruva the luckless ! But for all this, child,
It is not meet that thou shouldst ever grieve
As I have said. That man is truly wise
Who is content with what he has, and seeks
Nothing beyond, but in whatever sphere,
Lowly or great, God placed him, works in faith;
—My son, my son, though proud Suruchee spake
Harsh words indeed, and hurt thee to the quick,
Yet to thine eyes thy duty should be plain.

Collect a large sum of the virtues; thence
A goodly harvest must to thee arise.
Be meek, devout, and friendly, full of love,
Intent to do good to the human race
And to all creatures sentient made of God;
And oh, be humble, for on modest worth
Descends prosperity, even as water flows
Down to low grounds."

She finished, and her son,
Who patiently had listened, thus replied:—

"Mother, thy words of consolation find
Nor resting-place, nor echo in this heart
Broken by words severe, repulsing Love
That timidly approached to worship. Hear
My resolve unchangeable. I shall try
The highest good, the loftiest place to win,
Which the whole world deemes priceless and
desires.

There is a crown above my father's crown,
I shall obtain it, and at any cost
Of toil, or penance, or unceasing prayer.
Not born of proud Suruchee, whom the king
Favours and loves, but grown up from a germ

In thee, O mother, humble as thou art,
I yet shall show thee what is in my power.
Thou shalt behold my glory and rejoice.
Let Uttama my brother,—not thy son,—
Receive the throne and royal titles,—all
My father pleases to confer on him.
I grudge them not. Not with another's gifts
Desire I, dearest mother, to be rich,
But with my own work would acquire a name.
And I shall strive unceasing for a place
Such as my father hath not won,—a place
That would not know him even, —aye, a place
Far, far above the highest of this earth.”

He said, and from his mother's chambers past,
And went into the wood where hermits live,
And never to his father's house returned.

Well kept the boy his promise made that day !
By prayer and penance Dhruva gained at last
The highest heavens, and there he shines a star !
Nightly men see him in the firmament.

VI

BUTTOO

“Ho ! Master of the wondrous art !
Instruct me in fair archery,
And buy for aye,—a grateful heart
That will not grudge to give thy fee.
Thus spoke a lad with kindling eyes,
A hunter’s low-born son was he,—
To Dronacharjya, great and wise,
Who sat with princes round his knee.

Up Time’s fair stream far back,—oh far,
The great wise teacher must be sought !
The Kurus had not yet in war
With the Pandava brethren fought.
In peace, at Dronacharjya’s feet,
Magic and archery they learned,
A complex science, which we meet
No more, with ages past inurned.

“And who art thou,” the teacher said,
“My science brave to learn so fain?
Which many kings who wear the thread
Have asked to learn of me in vain.”
“My name is Buttoo,” said the youth,
“A hunter’s son, I know not Fear;”
The teacher answered, smiling smooth,
“Then know him from this time, my dear.”

Unseen the magic arrow came,
Amidst the laughter and the scorn
Of royal youths,—like lightning flame
Sudden and sharp. They blew the horn,
As down upon the ground he fell,
Not hurt, but made a jest and game;—
He rose,—and waved a proud farewell,
But cheek and brow grew red with shame.

And lo,—a single, single tear
Dropped from his eyelash as he past,
“My place I gather is not here:
No matter,—what is rank or caste?
In us is honour, or disgrace,
Not out of us,” ’twas thus he mused,
“The question is,—not wealth or place,
But gifts well used, or gifts abused.”

“And I shall do my best to gain
The science that man will not teach,
For life is as a shadow vain,
Until the utmost goal we reach
To which the soul points. I shall try
To realize my waking dream,
And what if I should chance to die?
None miss one bubble from a stream.”

So thinking, on and on he went,
Till he attained the forest's verge,
The garish day was well-nigh spent,
Birds had already raised its dirge.
Oh what a scene ! How sweet and calm !
It soothed at once his wounded pride,
And on his spirit shed a balm
That all its yearnings purified.

What glorious trees ! The sombre saul
On which the eye delights to rest,
The betel-nut,—a pillar tall,
With feathery branches for a crest,
The light-leaved tamarind spreading wide,
The pale faint-scented bitter neem,
The seemul, gorgeous as a bride,
With flowers that have the ruby's gleam,

The Indian fig's pavilion tent
In which whole armies might repose,
With here and there a little rent,
The sunset's beauty to disclose,
The bamboo boughs that sway and swing
'Neath bulbuls as the south wind blows,
The mangoe-tope, a close dark ring,
Home of the rooks and clamorous crows,

The champac, bok, and South-sea pine,
The nagessur with pendant flowers
Like ear-rings,—and the forest vine
That clinging over all, embowers,
The sirish famed in Sanscrit song
Which rural maidens love to wear,
The peepul gaint-like and strong,
The bramble with its matted hair,

All these, and thousands, thousands more,
With helmet red, or golden crown,
Or green tiara, rose before
The youth in evening's shadows brown.
He passed into the forest,—there
New sights of wonder met his view,
A waving Pampas green and fair
All glistening with the evening dew.

How vivid was the breast-high grass !
Here waved in patches, forest corn,—
Here intervened a deep morass,—
Here arid spots of verdure shorn
Lay open,—rock or barren sand,—
And here again the trees arose
Thick clustering,—a glorious band
Their tops still bright with sunset glows.—

Stirred in the breeze the crowding boughs,
And seemed to welcome him with signs,
Onwards and on,—till Buttoo's brows
Are gemmed with pearls, and day declines.
Then in a grassy open space
He sits and leans against a tree,
To let the wind blow on his face
And look around him leisurely.

Herds, and still herds, of timid deer
Were feeding in the solitude,
They knew not man, and felt no fear,
And heeded not his neighbourhood,
Some young ones with large eyes and sweet
Came close, and rubbed their foreheads smooth
Against his arms, and licked his feet,
As if they wished his cares to soothe.

“They touch me,” he exclaimed with joy
“They have no pride of caste like men,
They shrink not from the hunter-boy,
Should not my home be with them then?
Here in this forest let me dwell,
With these companions innocent,
And learn each science and each spell
All by myself in banishment.

“A calm, calm life,—and it shall be
Its own exceeding great reward !
No thoughts to vex in all I see,
No jeers to bear or disregard;—
All creatures and inanimate things
Shall be my tutors: I shall learn
From beast, and fish, and bird with wings
And rock, and stream, and trees, and fern.”

With this resolve, he soon began
To build a hut, of reeds and leaves,
And when that needful work was done
He gathered in his store, the sheaves
Of forest corn, and all the fruit,
Date, plum, guava, he could find,
And every pleasant nut and root
By Providence for man designed.

A statue next of earth he made,
An image of the teacher wise,
So deft he laid, the light and shade,
On figure, forehead, face and eyes,
That any one who chanced to view
That image tall might soothly swear,
If he great Dronacharjya knew,
The teacher in his flesh was there.

Then at the statue's feet he placed
A bow, and arrows tipped with steel,
With wild-flower garlands interlaced,
And hailed the figure in his zeal
As Master, and his head he bowed.
A pupil reverent from that hour
Of one who late had disallowed
The claim, in pride of place and power.

By strained sense, by constant prayer,
By steadfastness of heart and will,
By courage to confront and dare,
All obstacles he conquered still;
A conscience clear,—a ready hand,
Joined to a meek humility,
Success must everywhere command,
How could he fail who had all three !

And now, by tests assured, he knows
His own God-gifted wondrous might,
Nothing to any man he owes,
Unaided he has won the fight;
Equal to gods themselves,—above
Wishmo and Drona—for his worth
His name, he feels, shall be with love
Reckoned with great names of the earth.

Yet lacks he not in reverence
To Dronacharjya, who declined
To teach him,—nay, with e'en offence
That well might wound a noble mind,
Drove him away;—for in his heart
Meek, placable, and ever kind,
Resentment had not any part,
And Malice never was enshrined.

One evening, on his work intent,
Alone he practised Archery,
When lo ! the bow proved false and sent
The arrow from its mark awry;
Again he tried,—and failed again ;
Why was it? Hark !—a wild dog's bark !
An evil omen:—it was plain
Some evil on his path hung dark !

Thus many times he tried and failed,
And still that lean, persistent dog,
At distance, like some spirit wailed,
Safe in the cover of a fog.
His nerves unstrung, with many a shout
He strove to frighten it away,
It would not go,—but roamed about,
Howling, as wolves howl for their prey.

Worried and almost in a rage,
One magic shaft at last he sent,
A sample of his science sage,
To quiet but the noises meant.
Unerring to its goal it flew,
No death ensued, no blood was dropped,
But by the hush the young man knew
At last that howling noise had stopped.

It happened on this very day
That the Pandava princes came
With all the Kuru princes gay
To beat the woods and hunt the game.
Parted from others in the chase,
Arjuna brave the wild dog found,—
Stuck still the shaft,—but not a trace
Of hurt, though tongue and lip were bound.

“Wonder of wonders ! Didst not thou
O Dronacharjya, promise me
Thy crown in time should deck my brow
And I be first in archery?
Lo ! here, some other thou hast taught
A magic spell,—to all unknown;
Who has in secret from thee bought
The knowledge, in this arrow shown?”

Indignant thus Arjuna spake
To his great Master when they met—
“My word, my honour, is at stake,
Judge not, Arjuna, judge not yet.
Come, let us see the dog,”—and straight
They followed up the creature’s trace.
They found it, in the selfsame state,
Dumb, yet unhurt,—near Buttoo’s place.

A hut,—a statue,—and a youth
In the dim forest,—what mean these?
They gazed in wonder, for in sooth
The thing seemed full of mysteries.
“Now who art thou that dar’st to raise
Mine image in the wilderness?
Is it for worship and for praise?
What is thine object? speak, confess.”

“Oh Master, unto thee I came
To learn thy science. Name or pelf
I had not, so was driven with shame,
And here I learn all by myself.
But still as Master thee revere,
For who so great in archery !
Lo, all my inspiration here,
And all my knowledge is from thee.”

“If I am Master, how thou hast
Finished thy course, give me my due.
Let all the past be dead and past,
Henceforth be ties between us new.”

“All that I have, O Master mine,
All I shall conquer by my skill,
Gladly shall I to thee resign,
Let me but know thy gracious will.”

“Is it a promise?” “Yea, I swear
So long as I have breath and life
To give thee all thou wilt.” “Beware !
Rash promise ever ends in strife.”

“Thou art my Master,—ask ! oh ask !
From thee my inspiration came,
Thou canst not set too hard a task,
Nor aught refuse I, free from blame.”

“If it be so,—Arjuna hear !”
Arjuna and the youth were dumb,
“For thy sake, loud I ask and clear,
Give me, O youth, thy right-hand thumb.
I promised in my faithfulness
No equal ever shall there be
To thee, Arjuna,—and I press
For this sad recompense—for thee.”

Glanced the sharp knife one moment high,
The severed thumb was on the sod,
There was no tear in Buttoo’s eye,
He left the matter with his God.
“For this,”—said Dronacharjya,—“Fame
Shall sound thy praise from sea to sea,
And men shall ever link thy name
With Self-help, Truth, and Modesty.”

VII

SINDHU

PART I

Deep in the forest shades there dwelt
A *Muni* and his wife,
Blind, grayhaired, weak, they hourly felt
Their slender hold on life.

No friends had they, no help or stay,
Except an only boy,
A bright-eyed child, his laughter gay,
Their leaf-hut filled with joy.

Attentive, duteous, loving, kind,
Thoughtful, sedate, and calm,
He waited on his parents blind,
Whose days were like a psalm.

He roamed the woods for luscious fruits,
He brought them water pure,

He cooked their simple mess of roots,
Content to live obscure.

To fretful questions, answers mild
He meekly ever gave,
If they reproved, he only smiled,
He loved to be their slave.

Not that to him they were austere,
But age is peevish still,
Dear to their hearts he was,—so dear,
That none his place might fill.

They called him Sindhu, and his name
Was ever on their tongue,
And he, nor cared for wealth nor fame,
Who dwelt his own among.

A belt of *Bela* trees hemmed round
The cottage small and rude,
If peace on earth was ever found
'Twas in that solitude.

PART II

Great Dasarath, the King of Oude,
Whom all men love and fear,
With elephants and horses proud
Went forth to hunt the deer.

Oh gallant was the long array !
Pennons and plumes were seen,
And swords that mirrored back the day,
And spears and axes keen.

Rang trump, and conch, and piercing fife,
Woke Echo from her bed !
The solemn woods with sounds were rife
As on the pageant sped.

Hundreds, nay thousands, on they went !
The wild beasts fled away !
Deer ran in herds, and wild boars spent
Became an easy prey.

Whirring the peacocks from the brake
With Argus wings arose,
Wild swans abandoned pool and lake
For climes beyond the snows.

From tree to tree the monkeys sprung,
Unharm'd and unpursued,
As louder still the trumpets rung
And startled all the wood.

The porcupines and such small game
Unnoted fled at will,
The weasel only caught to tame
From fissures in the hill.

Slunk light the tiger from the bank,
But sudden turned to bay !
When he beheld the serried rank
That barred his tangled way.

Uprooting fig-trees on their path,
And trampling shrubs and flowers,
Wild elephants, in fear and wrath,
Burst through like moving towers.

Lowering their horns in crescents grim
 Whene'er they turned about,
Retreated into coverts dim
 The bisons' fiercer rout.

And in this mimic game of war
 In bands dispersed and past
The royal train,—some near, some far,
 As day closed in at last.

Where was the king? He left his friends
 At midday, it was known,
And now that evening fast descends
 Where was he? All alone?

Curving, the river formed a lake,
 Upon whose bank he stood,
No noise the silence there to break,
 Or mar the solitude.

Upon the glassy surface fell
 The last beams of the day,
Like fiery darts, that lengthening swell,
 As breezes wake and play.

Osiers and willows on the edge
And purple buds and red,
Leant down,—and 'mid the pale green sedge
The lotus raised its head.

And softly, softly, hour by hour
Light faded, and a veil
Fell over tree, and wave, and flower,
On came the twilight pale.

Deeper and deeper grew the shade,
Stars glimmered in the sky,
The nightingale along the glade
Raised her preluding cry.

What is that momentary flash?
A gleam of silver scales
Reveals the *Mahseer*;—then a splash,
And calm again prevails.

As darkness settled like a pall
The eye would pierce in vain,
The fireflies gemmed the bushes all,
Like fiery drops of rain.

Pleased with the scene,—and knowing not
Which way, alas ! to go,
The monarch lingered on the spot,—
The lake spread bright below.

He lingered, when—oh hark ! oh hark
What sound salutes his ear !
A roebuck drinking in the dark,
Not hunted, nor in fear.

Straight to the stretch his bow he drew,
That bow ne'er missed its aim,
Whizzing the deadly arrow flew,
Ear-guided, on the game !

Ah me ! What means this?—Hark, a cry,
A feeble human wail,
“Oh God!” it said—“I die,—I die,
Who'll carry home the pail?”

Startled, the monarch forward ran,
And then there met his view
A sight to freeze in any man
The warm blood coursing true.

A child lay dying on the grass,
A pitcher by his side,
Poor Sindhu was the child, alas !
His parents' stay and pride.

His bow and quiver down to fling,
And lift the wounded boy,
A moment's work was with the king.
Not dead,—that was a joy !

He placed the child's head on his lap,
And ranged the blinding hair,
The blood welled fearful from the gap
On neck and bosom fair.

He dashed cold water on the face,
He chafed the hands, with sighs,
Till sense revived, and he could trace
Expression in the eyes.

Then mingled with his pity, fear—
In all this universe
What is so dreadful as to hear
A Bramin's dying curse !

So thought the king, and on his brow
The beads of anguish spread,
And Sindhu, fully conscious now,
The anguish plainly read.

“What dost thou fear, O mighty king?
For sure a king thou art !
Why should thy bosom anguish wring?
No crime was in thine heart !

“Unwittingly the deed was done;
It is my destiny,
O fear not thou, but pity one
Whose fate is thus to die.

“No curses, no !—I bear no grudge,
Not thou my blood hast spilt,
Lo ! here before the unseen Judge,
Thee I absolve from guilt.

“The iron, red-hot as it burns,
Burns those that touch it too,
Not such my nature,—for it spurns,
Thank God, the like to do.

“Because I suffer, should I give
Thee, king, a needless pain?
Ah, no ! I die, but mayst thou live,
And cleansed from every stain !”

Struck with these words, and doubly grieved
At what his hands had done,
The monarch wept, as weeps bereaved
A man his only son.

“Nay, weep not so,” resumed the child,
“But rather let me say
My own sad story, sin-defiled,
And why I die to-day !

“Picking a living in our sheaves,
And happy in their loves,
Near, ’mid a peepul’s quivering leaves,
There lived a pair of doves.

“Never were they two separate,
And lo, in idle mood,
I took a sling and ball, elate
In wicked sport and rude,—

“And killed one bird,—it was the male,
Oh cruel deed and base !
The female gave a plaintive wail
And looked me in the face !”

“The wail and sad reproachful look
In plain words seemed to say,
‘A widowed life I cannot brook,
The forfeit thou must pay.’”

“‘What was my darling’s crime, that thou
Him wantonly shouldst kill?
The curse of blood is on thee now,
Blood calls for red blood still.’”

“And so I die—a bloody death—
But not for this I mourn,
To feel the world pass with my breath
I gladly could have borne,”

“But for my parents, who are blind,
And have no other stay,—
This, this weighs sore upon my mind,
And fills me with dismay.”

“Upon the eleventh day of the moon
They keep a rigorous fast,
All yesterday they fasted; soon
For water and repast.”

“They shall upon me feebly call !
Ah, must they call in vain?
Bear thou the pitcher, friend—’tis all
I ask—down that steep lane.”

He pointed,—ceased, —then sudden died !
The king took up the corpse,
And with the pitcher slowly hied, ‘
Attended by Remorse,

Down the steep lane—unto the hut
Girt round with *Bela* trees;
Gleamed far a light—the door not shut
Was open to the breeze.

PART III

“Oh why does not our child return?
Too long he surely stays.”—
Thus to the *Muni*, blind and stern,
His partner gently says.

“For fruits and water when he goes
He never stays so long,
Oh can it be, beset by foes,
He suffers cruel wrong?

“Some distance he has gone, I fear,
A more circuitous round,—
Yet, why should he? The fruits are near,
The river near our bound.

“I die of thirst,—it matters not
If Sindhu be but safe,
What if he leave us, and this spot,
Poor birds in cages chafe.

“Peevish and fretful oft we are,—
Ah, no—that cannot be:
Of our blind eyes he is the star,
Without him, what were we?

“Too much he loves us to forsake,
But something ominous,
Here in my heart, a dreadful ache,
Says, he is gone from us.

“Why do my bowels for him yearn,
What ill has crossed his path?
Blind, helpless, whither shall we turn,
Or how avert the wrath?

“Lord of my soul—what means my pain?
This horrid terror,—like
Some cloud that hides a hurricane;
Hang not, O lightning,—strike !”

Thus while she spake, the king drew near
With haggard look and wild,
Weighed down with grief, and pale with fear,
Bearing the lifeless child.

Rustled the dry leaves 'neath his foot,
And made an eerie sound,
A neighbouring owl began to hoot,
All else was still around.

At the first rustle of the leaves
The *Muni* answered clear,
"Lo, here he is—oh wherefore grieves
Thy soul, my partner dear?"

The words distinct the monarch heard,
He could no further go,
His nature to its depths was stirred,
He stopped in speechless woe.

No steps advanced,—the sudden pause
Attention quickly drew,
Rolled sightless orbs to learn the cause,
But, hark !—the steps renew.

"Where art thou, darling—why so long
Hast thou delayed to-night?
We die of thirst,—we are not strong,
This fasting kills outright.

“Speak to us, dear one,—only speak,
And calm our idle fears,
Where hast thou been, and what to seek?
Have pity on these tears.”

With head bent low the monarch heard,
Then came a cruel throb
That tore his heart,—still not a word,
Only a stifled sob !

“It is not Sindhu—who art thou?
And where is Sindhu gone?
There’s blood upon thy hands—avow !”
“There is.”—“Speak on, speak on.”

The dead child in their arms he placed,
And briefly told his tale,
The parents their dead child embraced,
And kissed his forehead pale.

“Our hearts are broken. Come, dear wife,
On earth no more we dwell;
Now welcome death, and farewell Life,
And thou, O king, farewell !

“We do not curse thee, God forbid !
But to my inner eye
The future is no longer hid,
Thou too shalt like us die.

“Die—for a son’s untimely loss !
Die—with a broken heart !
Now help us to our bed of moss,
And let us both depart.”

Upon the moss he laid them down,
And watched beside the bed;
Death gently came and placed a crown
Upon each reverend head.

Where the Sarayu’s waves dash free
Against a rocky bank,
The monarch had the corpses three
Conveyed by men of rank;

There honoured he with royal pomp
Their funeral obsequies,—
Incense and sandal, drum and tromp,
And solemn sacrifice.

What is the sequel of the tale?
How died the king?—Oh man,
A prophet's words can never fail—
Go, read the Ramayan.

VIII

PRAHLAD

A terror both of gods and men
Was Heerun Kasyapu, the king:
No bear more sullen in its den,
No tiger quicker at the spring.
In strength of limb he had not met,
Since first his black flag he unfurled,
Nor in audacious courage, yet,
His equal in the wide, wide world.

The holy Veds he tore in shreds;
Libations, sacrifices, rites,
He made all penal; and the heads
Of Bramins slain, he flung to kites,
"I hold the sceptre in my hand,
I sit upon the ivory throne,
Bow down to me—'tis my command,
And worship me, and me alone.

“No god has ever me withstood,
Why raise ye altars?—cease your pains !
I shall protect you, give you food,
If ye obey,—or else the chains.”
Fled at such edicts, self-exiled,
The Bramins and the pundits wise,
To live thenceforth in forests wild,
Or caves in hills that touch the skies.

In secret there, they altars raised,
And made oblations due by fire,
Their gods, their wonted gods, they praised,
Lest these should earth destroy in ire;
They read the Veds, they prayed and mused,
Full well they knew that Time would bring
For favours scorned, and gifts misused,
Undreamt-of-changes on his wing.

Time changes deserts bare to meads,
And fertile meads to deserts bare,
Cities to pools, and pools with reeds
To towns and cities large and fair.
Time changes purple into rags,
And rags to purple. Chime by chime,
Whether it flies, or runs, or drags—
The wise wait patiently on Time.

Time brought the tyrant children four,
Rahd, Onoorahd, Prehlad, Sunghrad,
Who made his castle gray and hoar,
Once full of gloom, with sunshine gl'd.
No boys were e'er more beautiful,
No brothers e'er loved more each other,
No sons were e'er more dutiful,
Nor ever kissed a fonder mother.

Nor less beloved were they of him
Who gave them birth, Kasyapu proud,
But made by nature stern and grim,
His love was covered by a cloud
From which it rarely e'er emerged,
To gladden these sweet human flowers.
They grew apace, and now Time urged
The education of their powers.

Who should their teacher be? A man
Among the flatterers in the court
Was found, well-suited to the plan
The tyrant had devised. Report
Gave him a wisdom owned by few,
And certainly to trim his sail,
And veer his bark, none better knew,
Before a changing adverse gale.

And Sonda Marco,—such his name,—
Took home the four fair boys to teach
All knowledge that their years became,
Science, and war, and modes of speech,
But he was told, if death he feared,
Never to tell them of the soul,
Of vows, and prayers, and rites revered,
And of the gods who all control.

The sciences the boys were taught
They mastered with a quickness strange,
But Prehlad was the one for thought,
He soared above the lesson's range.
One day the tutor unseen heard
The boy discuss forbidden themes,
As if his inmost heart were stirred,
And he of truth from heaven had gleams.

“O Prince, what mean'st thou?” In his fright
The teacher thus in private said—
“Talk on such subjects is not right,
Wouldst thou bring ruin on my head?
There are no gods except the king,
The ruler of the world is he !
Look up to him, and do not bring
Destruction by a speech too free.

“Be wary for thy own sake, child,
If he should hear thee talking so,
Thou shalt for ever be exiled,
And I shall die, full well I know.
Worthy of worship, honour, praise,
Is thy great father. Things unseen,
What *are* they?—Themes of poets’ lays !
They *are* not and have never been.”

Smiling, the boy, with folded hands,
As sign of a submission meek,
Answered his tutor. “Thy commands
Are ever precious. Do not seek
To lay upon me what I feel
Would be unrighteous. Let me hear
Those inner voices that reveal
Long vistas in another sphere.

“The gods that rule the earth and sea,
Shall I abjure them and adore
A man? It may not, may not be;
Though I should lie in pools of gore
My conscience I would hurt no more;
But I shall follow what my heart
Tells me is right, so I implore
My purpose fixed no longer thwart.

“The coward calls black white, white black,
At bidding, or in fear of death;
Such suppleness, thank God, I lack,
To die is but to lose my breath.
Is death annihilation? No.
New worlds will open on my view,
When persecuted hence I go,
The right is right,—the true is true.”

All's over now, the teacher thought,
Now let this reach the monarch's ear!
And instant death shall be my lot.
They parted, he in abject fear.
And soon he heard a choral song
Sung by young voices in the praise
Of gods unseen, who right all wrong,
And rule the worlds from primal days.

“What progress have thy charges made?
Let them be called, that I may see.”
And Sonda Marco brought as bade
His pupils to the royal knee.
Three passed the monarch's test severe,
The fourth remained: then spake the king,
“Now, Prehlad, with attention hear,
I know thou hast the strongest wing!

“What is the cream of knowledge, child,
Which men take such great pains to learn?”

With folded hands he answered mild:

“Listen, O Sire ! To speak I yearn.

All sciences are nothing worth,—

Astronomy that tracks the star,

Geography that maps the earth,

Logic, and Politics, and War,—

“And Medicine, that strives to heal

But only aggravates disease,

All, all are futile,—so I feel,

For me, O father, none of these.

That is true knowledge which can show

The glory of the living gods,—

Divest of pride, make men below

Humble and happy, though but clods.

“That is true knowledge which can make

Us mortals saintlike, holy, pure,

The strange thirst of the spirit slake

And strengthen suffering to endure.

That is true knowledge which can change

Our very natures with its glow;

The sciences whate’er their range

Feed but the flesh, and make a show.

“Where hast thou learnt this nonsense, boy?
Where live these gods believed so great?
Can they like me thy life destroy?
Have they such troops and royal state?
Above all gods is he who rules
The wide, wide earth, from sea to sea,
Men, devils, gods,—yea, all but fools
Bow down in fear and worship me !

“And dares an atom from my loins
Against my kingly power rebel?
Though heaven itself to aid him joins,
His end is death—the infidel !
I warn thee yet,—bow down, thou slave,
And worship me, or thou shalt die !
We’ll see what gods descend to save—
What gods with me their strength will try !”

Thus spake the monarch in his ire,
One hand outstretched, in menace rude,
And eyes like blazing coals of fire.
And Prehlad, in unruffled mood
Straight answered him; his head bent low,
His palms joined meekly on his breast
As ever, and his cheeks aglow
His rock-firm purpose to attest.

“Let not my words, Sire, give offence,
To thee, and to my mother, both
I give as due all reverence,
And to obey thee am not loth.
But higher duties sometimes clash
With lower,—then these last must go,—
Or there will come a fearful crash
In lamentation, fear, and woe !

“The gods who made us are the life
Of living creatures, small and great;
We see them not, but space is rife
With their bright presence and their state.
They are the parents of us all,
'Tis they create, sustain, redeem,
Heaven, earth and hell, they hold in thrall,
And shall we these high gods blaspheme?

“Blest is the man whose heart obeys
And makes their law of life his guide,
He shall be led in all his ways,
His footsteps shall not ever slide;
In forests dim, on raging seas
In certain peace shall he abide,
What though he all the world displease,
His gods shall all his wants provide !

“Cease, babbler ! ’tis enough ! I know
Thy proud, rebellious nature well.
Ho ! Captain of our lifeguards, ho !
Take down this lad to dungeon-cell,
And bid the executioner wait
Our orders.” All unmoved and calm,
He went, as reckless of his fate,
Erect and stately, as a palm.

Hushed was the hall, as down he past,
No breath, no whisper, not a sign,
Through ranks of courtiers, all aghast
Like beaten hounds that dare not whine.
Outside the door, the Captain spoke,
“Recant,” he said beneath his breath;
“The lion’s anger to provoke
Is death, O prince, is certain death.”

“Thanks,” said the prince,—“I have revolved
The question in my mind with care,
Do what you will,—I am resolved
To do the right, all deaths I dare.
The gods, perhaps, may please to spare
My tender years; if not,—why, still
I never shall my faith forswear,
I can but say, be done their will.”

Whether in pity for the youth,
The headsman would not rightly ply
The weapon, or the gods in truth
Had ordered that he should not die,
Soon to the king there came report
The sword would not destroy his son,
The council held thereon was short,
The king's look frightened every one.

“There is a speli against cold steel
Which known, the steel can work no harm,
Some sycophant with baneful zeal
Hath taught this foolish boy the charm.
It would be wise, O king, to deal
Some other way, or else I fear
Much damage to the common weal.”
Thus spake the wily-tongued vizier.

Dark frowned the king.—“Enough of this,—
Death, instant death, is my command !
Go throw him down some precipice,
Or bury him alive in sand.”
With terror dumb, from that wide hall
Departed all the courtier band,
But not one man amongst them all
Dared raise against the prince his hand.

And now vague rumours ran around,
Men talked of them with bated breath:
The river has a depth profound,
The elephants trample down to death,
The poisons kill, the firebrands burn.
Had every means in turn been tried?
Some said they had,—but soon they learn
The brave young prince had not yet died.

For once more in the Council-Hall
He had been cited to appear,
’Twas open to the public all,
And all the people came in fear.
Banners were hung along the wall,
The King sat on his peacock throne,
And now the hoary Marechal
Brings in the youth,—bare skin and bone.

“Who shall protect thee, Prehlad, now?
Against steel, poison, water, fire,
Thou art protected, men avow
Who treason, if but bold, admire.
In our own presence thou art brought
That we and all may know the truth—
Where are thy gods?—I long have sought
But never found them, hapless youth.

“Will they come down, to prove their strength,
Will they come down, to rescue thee?
Let them come down, for once, at length,
Come one, or all, to fight with me.
Where are thy gods? Or are they dead,
Or do they hide in craven fear?
There lies my gage. None ever said
I hide from any,—far or near.”

“My gracious Liege, my Sire, my King,
If thou indeed wouldst deign to hear,
In humble mood, my words would spring
Like a pellucid fountain clear,
For I have in my dungeon dark
Learnt more of truth than e’er I knew,
There is one God—One only,—mark !
To Him is all our service due.

“Hath He a shape, or hath He none?
I know not this, nor care to know,
Dwelling in light, to which the sun
Is darkness,—He sees all below,
Himself unseen ! In Him I trust,
He can protect me if He will,
And if this body turn to dust,
He can new life again instil.

"I fear not fire, I fear not sword,
All dangers, father, I can dare;
Alone, I can confront a horde,
For oh ! my God is everywhere !"
"What ! everywhere? Then in this hall,
And in this crystal pillar bright?
Now tell me plain, before us all,
Is He herein, thy God of light?"

The monarch placed his steel-gloved hand
Upon a crystal pillar near,
In mockful jest was his demand,
The answer came, low, serious, clear:
"Yes, father, God is even here,
And if he choose this very hour
Can strike us dead, with ghastly fear,
And vindicate His name and power."

"Where is this God? Now let us see."
He spurned the pillar with his foot,
Down, down it tumbled, like a tree
Severed by axes from the root,
And from within, with horrid clang
That froze the blood in every vein,
A stately sable warrior sprang,
Like some phantasma of the brain.

He had a lion head and eyes,
A human body, feet and hands,
Colossal,—such strange shapes arise
In clouds, when Autumn rules the lands !
He gave a shout;—the boldest quailed,
Then struck the tyrant on the helm,
And ripped him down; and last, he hailed
Prehlad as king of all the realm !

A thunder clap—the shape was gone !
One king lay stiff, and stark, and dead,
Another on the peacock throne
Bowed reverently his youthful head.
Loud rang the trumpets; louder still
A sovereign people's wild acclaim.
The echoes rang from hill to hill,
“Kings rule for us and in our name.”

Tyrants of every age and clime
Remember this,—that awful shape
Shall startle you when comes the time,
And send its voice from cape to cape.
As human peoples suffer pain,
But oh, the lion strength is theirs,
Woe to the king when galls the chain !
Woe, woe, their fury when he dares !

IX

SÎTA

Three happy children in a darkened room !
What do they gaze on with wide-open eyes?
A dense, dense forest, where no sunbeam pries,
And in its centre a cleared spot.—There bloom
Gigantic flowers on creepers that embrace
Tall trees; there, in a quiet lucid lake
The white swans glide; there, “whirring from
the brake,”
The peacock springs; there, herds of wild deer
race;
There, patches gleam with yellow waving grain;
There, blue smoke from strange altars rises light,
There dwells in peace the poet-anchorite.
But who is this fair lady? Not in vain
She weeps,—for lo ! at every tear she sheds
Tears from three pairs of young eyes fall amain,
And bowed in sorrow are the three young heads.
It is an old, old story, and the lay

Which has evoked sad Sîta from the past
Is by a mother sung.. . . 'Tis hushed at last
And melts the picture from their sight away,
Yet shall they dream of it until the day !
When shall those children by their mother's
 side
Gather, ah me ! as erst at eventide?

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

NEAR HASTINGS

Near Hastings, on the shingle-beach,
We loitered at the time
When ripens on the wall the peach,
The autumn's lovely prime.
Far off,—the sea and sky seemed blent,
The day was wholly done,
The distant town its murmurs sent,
Strangers,—we were alone.

We wandered slow; sick, weary, faint,
Then one of us sat down,
No nature hers, to make complaint;—
The shadows deepened brown.
A lady past,—she was not young,
But oh! her gentle face
No painter-poet ever sung,
Or saw such saintlike grace.

She past us,—then she came again,
Observing at a glance
That we were strangers; one, in pain,—
Then asked,—Were we from France?
We talked awhile,—some roses red
That seemed as wet with tears,
She gave my sister, and she said,
“God bless you both, my dears!”

Sweet were the roses,—sweet and full,
And large as lotus flowers
That in our own wide tanks we cull
To deck our Indian bowers.
But sweeter was the love that gave
Those flowers to one unknown,
I think that He who came to save
The gift a debt will own.

The lady's name I do not know,
Her face no more may see,
But yet, oh yet I love her so!
Blest, happy, may she be!
Her memory will not depart,
Though grief my years should shade,
Still bloom her roses in my heart!
And they shall never fade!

FRANCE

1870

Not dead,—oh no,—she cannot die!

Only a swoon, from loss of blood!

Levite England passes her by,

Help, Samaritan! None is nigh;

Who shall stanch me this sanguine flood?

Range the brown hair, it blinds her eyne,

Dash cold water over her face!

Drowned in her blood, she makes no sign,

Give her a draught of generous wine.

None heed, none hear, to do this grace.

Head of the human column, thus

Ever in swoon wilt thou remain?

Thought, Freedom, Truth, quenched ominous,

Whence then shall Hope arise for us,

Plunged in the darkness all again?

No, she stirs!—There's a fire in her glance,
Ware, oh ware of that broken sword!
What, dare ye for an hour's mischance,
Gather around her, jeering France,
Attila's own exultant horde?

Lo, she stands up,—stands up e'en now,
Strong once more for the battle-fray,
Gleams bright the star, that from her brow
Lightens the world. Bow, nations, bow,
Let her again lead on the way!

THE TREE OF LIFE

Broad daylight, with a sense of weariness!
Mine eyes were closed, but I was not asleep,
My hand was in my father's, and I felt
His presence near me. Thus we often past
In silence, hour by hour. What was the need
Of interchanging words when every thought
That in our hearts arose, was known to each,
And every pulse kept time? Suddenly there
shone

A strange light, and the scene as sudden changed.
I was awake:—It was an open plain
Illimitable,—stretching, stretching—oh, so far!
And o'er it that strange light,—a glorious light
Like that the stars shed over fields of snow
In a clear, cloudless, frosty winter night,
Only intenser in its brilliance calm.
And in the midst of that vast plain, I saw,
For I was wide awake,—it was no dream,
A tree with spreading branches and with leaves
Of divers kinds,—dead silver and live gold,

Shimmering in radiance that no words may tell!
Beside the tree an Angel stood; he plucked
A few small sprays, and bound them round my
head.

Oh, the delicious touch of those strange leaves!
No longer throbbed my brows, no more I felt
The fever in my limbs—"And oh," I cried,
"Bind too my father's forehead with these
leaves."

One leaf the Angel took and there with touched
His forehead, and then gently whispered "Nay!
Never, oh never had I seen a face
More beautiful than that Angel's, or more full
Of holy pity and of love divine.
Wondering I looked awhile,—then, all at once
Opened my tear-dimmed eyes—When lo! the
light

Was gone—the light as of the stars when snow
Lies deep upon the ground. No more, no more,
Was seen the Angel's face. I only found
My father watching patient by my bed,
And holding in his own, close-prest, my hand.

ON THE FLY-LEAF OF ERCKMANN-
CHATRIAN'S NOVEL ENTITLED
"MADAME THÉRÈSE"

Wavered the foremost soldiers,—then fell back.
Fallen was their leader, and loomed right before
The sullen Prussian cannon, grim and black,
With lighted matches waving. Now, once more,
Patriots and veterans!—Ah! 'Tis in vain!
Back they recoil, though bravest of the brave;
No human troops may stand that murderous
rain;
But who is this—that rushes to a grave?

It is a woman,—slender, tall, and brown!
She snatches up the standard as it falls,—
In her hot haste tumbles her dark hair down,
And to the drummer-boy aloud she calls
To beat the charge; then forwards on the *pont*
They dash together;—who could bear to see
A woman and a child, thus Death confront,
Nor burn to follow them to victory?

I read the story and my heart beats fast!
Well might all Europe quail before thee, France,
Battling against oppression! Years have past,
Yet of that time men speak with moistened
glance.

Va-nu-pieds! When rose high your Marseillaise
Man knew his rights to earth's remotest bound,
And tyrants trembled. Yours alone the praise!
Ah, had a Washington but then been found!

SONNET—BAUGMAREE

A sea of foliage girds our garden round,
But not a sea of dull unvaried green,
Sharp contrasts of all colours here are seen;
The light-green graceful tamarinds abound
Amid the mangoe clumps of green profound,
And palms arise, like pillars gray, between;
And o'er the quiet pools the seemuls lean,
Red,—red, and startling like a trumpet's sound.
But nothing can be lovelier than the ranges
Of bamboos to the eastward, when the moon
Looks through their gaps, and the white lotus
changes
Into a cup of silver. One might swoon
Drunken with beauty then, or gaze and gaze
On a primeval Eden, in amaze.

SONNET—THE LOTUS

Love came to Flora asking for a flower
That would of flowers be undisputed queen,
The lily and the rose, long, long had been
Rivals for that high honour. Bards of power
Had sung their claims. "The rose can never
tower
Like the pale lily with her Juno mien"—
"But is the lily lovelier?" Thus between
Flower-factions rang the strife in Psyche's bower.
"Give me a flower delicious as the rose
And stately as the lily in her pride"—
"But of what colour?"—"Rose-red," Love
first chose,
Then prayed,—“No, lily-white,—or, both provide;”
And Flora gave the lotus, “rose red” dyed,
And “lily-white,” queenliest flower that blows.

OUR CASUARINA TREE

Like a huge Python, winding round and round
The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars
Up to its very summit near the stars,
A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
No other tree could live. But gallantly
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung
In crimson clusters all the boughs among,
Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;
And oft at nights the garden overflows
With one sweet song that seems to have no close,
Sung darkling from our tree, while men re-
pose.

When first my casement is wide open thrown
At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;
Sometimes, and most in winter,—on its crest
A gray baboon sits statue-like alone
Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs
His puny offspring leap about and play;

